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Prologue

~COPYRIGHT STATEMENT REGARDING MY WARRIORS FICS~
I am putting this here simply because it has become quite an issue lately. Please DO NOT use my original characters/clans/concepts in any of your Warriors fics. (This does not include warriors cats with the same names. I understand coincidences if we happened to pick the same names for our characters.) I work hard on my novels, and it is upsetting to witness a circumstance where the author feels they need to "borrow" ideas/characters from me because they're not creative enough. Simply stated, the Warriors world is big and complex enough for an author to be able to create his or her own characters/clans/plot. Thank you for your understanding.

~STATEMENT REGARDING GRAMMATICAL ERRORS AND COMMENTS~

Please REFRAIN from continually correcting typos and grammatical errors. I am a grammar nazi myself, and I understand some of you are too, but I have several published works and do not have time to correct EVERY error. Unless the error severely limits your understanding of the story, I will not be taking immediate action to fix these typos. Please REFRAIN from telling me "cats can't cry" and "cats can't blush" etc. These novels are a work of FICTION. I know cats can't cry and perform human-like characteristics; however, this is a work of fiction and is written in a way to convey emotion. I am sick and tired of getting comments like these because they detract from my work and make it seem like you care more about correcting typos/ (sorry) being a pompous know-it-all than reading and enjoying a work. Don't be surprised if I get sassy/sarcastic with you in the comments. I ask you refrain from making such comments on my work.

Rosefur looked down and smiled at her three newborn kits. Her gray and white pelt had definitely shown up in the kits, as well as her mate, Olivetail.

Olivetail stood beside Rosefur, purring at the newborn kits.

"What will we call them?" he asked his mate.

Rosefur thought for a moment. "Well," she began, looking down at the three kits. There was a white she-cat, a white tom, and a gray tabby she-cat. She pondered for a moment.

"We can call the white she-cat Petalkit. Oh, and the white tom can be Cloudkit!" she announced. "You name the last."

Olivetail glanced at the gray tabby she-cat. She slept soundly unlike her siblings who mewed loudly and squirmed around. She was the runt of the litter, but still, beautiful. "Skykit," he announced.

Rosefur purred. "Oh, I love that name!"

Skykit reminded Rosefur of her sister, Jetpelt. Rosefur let out a sigh. Her sister had joined StarClan not too long ago after coming down with greencough. Her only kit, Blackkit, had run off when Jetpelt's mate was too depressed to take care of him.

Rosefur hated thinking about her past. Everytime she thought of her past, she was reminded of her father and how he jumped over that cliff. She thought of her mother abandoning Rosefur and her siblings when they were only seven moons. Rosefur expected her mother had died by now since all her family did.

As Olivetail stared longer at the kits, his smile turned into a frown.

"What's wrong?" Rosefur asked nervously. Was he not happy with his children?

Olivetail let out a sigh. "Not too long ago, a large group of cats threatened war on ForestClan. I was leading my patrol when it happened. Birchstar agreed war, and I-well, they looked tough. Rosefur, I don't want our kits endangered."

"What do you mean?" Rosefur asked, anger bubbling up inside her.

Olivetail looked down at his white and gray paws. "ForestClan is't safe anymore! Please, take the kits away from here! Raise them in

another clan! So many deaths of cats this moon worries me. I don't want one of our kits dying, or you."

"I'll be fine!" Rosefur hissed. "I'm not helpless!"

She looked down at the kits sleeping beside her.

But you are, she thought.

"Please, Rosefur," Olivetail pleaded. "For the kits. You can come back in three moons," he told her. "Nothing will change."

Rosefur growled. She knew everything would change, but the way Olivetail was pleading made her realize how serious the situation was.

"Fine," she growled. "And will you be coming?"

Olivetail shook his head. "No, the journey is for you to make. But meet me back here in three moons unless I find you."

Rosefur nodded, knowing exactly what she would do in those three moons. Rosefur would find her mother.

Chapter 1

For moons the four of them trudged through the forest, and Skykit still didn't understand. She didn't understand why they had been walking, why they had stopped at so many clans yet never found a home, and why they couldn't return home.

Petalkit and Cloudkit seemed fine with the idea. They spent their days chasing butterflies and tackling each other. But Skykit strayed aside. She didn't want to ruin their fun. Did they ever wonder about why they were here?

Skykit felt her mother nudge her awake. They had taken shelter in FireClan for the night, and they had stayed in one of the empty dens.

The leader, Honeystar, seemed very kind. Skykit had even made friends with another kit named Lionkit. He seemed to understand her better than she understood herself.

"Wake up, Skykit," her mother said gently.

Skykit let out a big yawn and rose to her feet. "Mother, are we going to stay in FireClan? The cats here are so nice! I want this to be my home," she announced.

Skykit was disappointed as she watched Rosefur's smile turn into a frown. "I'm afraid not, Skykit. I don't think it's the right clan for us."

"That's what you always say," Skykit complained.

She watched as her mother desperately tried to smile. "We'll find our home soon."

Skykit didn't believe her mother one bit. Here, they had spent moons trying to find a home, and Skykit still had trouble understanding why they couldn't stay in one clan.

Honeystar padded over to the group of cats, a smile on her face.

"How are you doing?" she asked Rosefur.

Rosefur purred. "Oh, just fine, thank you. I wanted to let you know we'll be on our way now. We don't want to bother you."

"Oh, well, you don't have to leave," Honeystar told Rosefur. "You are welcome to join our clan if you want. I don't turn down strong warriors."

Skykit smiled at the cream-colored she-cat. Maybe her mother would decide to stay.

"That's very kind of you, but I'm afraid we'll be on our way now," Rosefur told the she-cat. Skykit frowned at her mother, but Rosefur hardly noticed.

Honeystar dipped her head, and within a few moments, the siblings were on their way into the forest once again. Would they ever find a home?

"Skykit!" an urgent voice came.

Skykit turned around to see a small ginger kit. Lionkit.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"I'm leaving," she told him. She tried to hide the pain in her words. She didn't want Lionkit to think she was weak.

"What? Why?" Lionkit asked.

"We were never meant to stay here," Skykit explained. "We're just finding a temporary home for now. I'll be heading back to my real clan soon." These were thoughts she tried to think were true.

"Where is your real home?" Lionkit whimpered. She noticed how glassy his eyes had become.

"I don't know," Skykit replied honestly.

Lionkit seemed confused, and no more words tumbled out of his mouth. Instead, with watery eyes, he glanced at Skykit one last

time. Then, he ran back off to his clan. The last time Skykit would ever see him...

Skykit looked out into the distance, hoping he would return. But the small tom did not. Skykit's only friend was gone.

Skykit tried to turn, but her legs were stuck to the ground.

"Skykit, come on," Petalkit urged.

Skykit glanced behind one last time and walked off slowly, heading back on her journey.

Chapter 2

When Skykit reached five moons, it seemed like Rosefur was finally going to give up her search. But then, everything changed when Cloudkit accidentally stumbled into SnowClan's territory.

Skykit watched as her mother sniffed around. "This smells familiar," she said quietly, but loud enough that Skykit could detect it.

Skykit knew this wasn't their real home, but all she desperately wanted was a place she could call home. As Skykit followed her mother into the camp, they were greeted by a white she-cat.

"Hello," Rosefur began. "I apologize, but we've traveled far, and I was wondering if we may stay at camp your camp for awhile."

The white she-cat stared at Rosefur as if she were staying at StarClan cat. Her expression though quickly faded away.

"Oh, of course," the white she-cat said. "We never turn down new warriors. Our clan is just beginning. I'm Icestar. Pleasure to meet you."

Rosefur stared at Icestar furiously. Skykit wasn't sure why.

"Oh, well, I'm Rosefur, and these are my three kits. The tom is Cloudkit," she announced. Skykit watched as Petalkit laughed as Cloudkit tried to puff out his chest. "This is Petalkit," Rosefur said, pointing to the white she-cat. Petalkit greeted Icestar with a smile. "And this is Skykit," Rosefur announced. Skykit didn't smile or frown. She just looked up at Icestar with a blank expression.

"I hope you don't mind, but two of our kits are orphaned and are in need of a mother. Do you mind nursing them?" Icestar asked.

"Not at all," Rosefur told her.

Skykit followed her mother and siblings into a den where they met the two orphaned kits. There was a ginger she-cat named Dovekit

and a white she-cat named Frostkit. Frostkit seemed shy while Dovekit seemed more mysterious. Skykit wished Lionkit were here with her.

A few sunrises passed, and Skykit had been enjoying her time in SnowClan. It seemed like her mother would be staying here for awhile.

Only yesterday, she had met a new friend, Blackpaw. He was a friendly tom who seemed to enjoy playing with Skykit and her siblings.

Skykit's ears pricked as the tom padded towards the kits.

"Hey, Petalkit, Cloudkit, Skykit!" he said, letting out a gentle smile.

Whenever Blackpaw was around, Skykit's thoughts would fade, and she would focus on more positive subjects.

Skykit's thoughts were interrupted however as a brown tabby she-cat entered. Her eyes were a deep green, like Blackpaw's.

"This is Thornpaw," Blackpaw said, introducing the she-cat to the kits. "She wanted to meet you three."

"Hi!" Cloudkit and Petalkit shouted in unison.

"Hi," Skykit said quietly.

Cloudkit and Petalkit began to play with Blackpaw and Thornpaw while Skykit stood off to the side, watching from a distance.

Thornpaw tilted her head as she noticed Skypaw, and Skypaw felt her stomach drop as she came over towards her.

"Why don't you play with your siblings, Skykit?" she asked.

Skykit shrugged. "I just don't feel like it, I guess. I'd rather just watch."

"Suit yourself," Thornpaw said, turning away to play with the kits.

Skykit headed into the nursery to find her mother, but to her surprise, the den remained empty with the exception of Dovekit and Frostkit.

Skykit shrugged, but she knew something was up. Her mother wouldn't just vanish randomly. Would she?

Chapter 3

As the days in the nursery went on, Skykit continued playing with Blackpaw and Thornpaw. As they played, it seemed Skykit grew closer.

Cloudkit had been growing apart lately though as he spent more time with Dovekit than his sisters. Skykit and Petalkit though had been getting along very well, a miracle for once.

Rosefur had returned a day later after Skykit found her missing. She didn't tell anyone why, and she hadn't vanished again, so Skykit believed it had been nothing really. Perhaps she had accidentally fallen asleep in the woods and decided to hunt before returning.

Skykit's paws tingled as she thought of her apprentice ceremony. It would be soon, and she couldn't wait to train with Blackpaw. She had grown on the black tom, and she never wanted to do anything without him.

But Blackpaw was eleven moons old, and he would be a warrior soon. She wouldn't be able to train with him or sleep in the same den as him for long.

Dovekit and Cloudkit tumbled around in the corner of the nursery while Petalkit turned to her sister.

"What do you want to play?" she asked.

"How about mossball?" Skykit suggested. Before Petalkit could even say another word, Icestar rushed into the den, out of breath.

"The river is flooding! Everyone out now!" she yowled.

Before Skykit could move, Rosefur picked her up by the scruff as her siblings crawled onto their mother's back. Dovekit followed behind Rosefur, racing to keep up with her.

The water had not entered the camp yet, but the clan had already

broken out into pandemonium as they could spot water in the distance.

"Queens and kits will climb in the trees," Applewhisker, the deputy, announced.

Applewhisker helped Rosefur and Skykit's siblings climb up into a tall tree, Dovekit following behind them. Skykit was relieved to be safe and sound with her siblings in the branches. Cloudkit seemed happy Dovekit was safe too.

Cats still broke out into chaos though as they climbed trees and tall objects. The water was beginning to pour into the camp, causing the ground to turn damp. Skykit turned, noticing Blackpaw and Thornpaw rush for some high ground. As much as she wanted to help, she knew she couldn't leave her tree.

Skykit waited for several more minutes until water began to rush into the clan. Cats climbed on rocks, some clung to branches, and some had nowhere to go. As Blackpaw and Thornpaw crawled onto a rock, Thornpaw slipped, falling into the water. Skykit watched in shock as Blackpaw dived in after her.

Skykit began to get nervous as she watched the two thrash around in the water. What if Blackpaw drowned?

As Thornpaw was pushed around by the water, Blackpaw grabbed her by the scruff. Skykit could already tell though that he was exhausted, and he panted heavily as he lifted her onto the rock.

He then attempted to crawl on the rock, only to be pulled away by the water. She watched as his head was pushed under water by the rushing current.

"BLACKPAW!" she yowled from the tree, her heart pounding.

But she did not see him again, and he did not come back up. Skykit tried not to go insane or leap from the tree. First she left Lionkit, and now Blackpaw was gone. She wanted so bad to jump down there and look for him, but she knew she would drown.

Petalkit and Cloudkit seemed worried too, but not as much as

Skykit. She dug her claws into the tree bark, trying not to yell to StarClan. She wanted to blame them for all the horrible things they had done to her, but she couldn't. She knew they hadn't caused this.

Hours went by, and when the water could easily be walked through, cats came down. Thornpaw had disappeared, and Skykit believed the water had eaten her up too.

She looked up, watching as Icestar padded up to the tall rock.

"ALL CATS OLD ENOUGH TO CATCH THEIR OWN PREY, JOIN BENEATH THE TALL ROCK FOR A CLAN MEETING!" she yowled.

"This flood was terrible," Icestar began. "Our dens are destroyed, but, with enough effort, we can easily rebuild them. No cats died, but Thornpaw and Blackpaw are missing. My only hope is that they are still alive."

Skykit sighed. Blackpaw was gone. Her second friend, vanished.

Chapter 4

Skykit and her siblings sat on the tall rock in the SnowClan camp, waiting as Icestar performed their apprentice ceremony. Her paws tingled with excitement, and she took in a deep breath as Icestar began.

"Skykit, Cloudkit, and Petalkit have reached six moons, which means they are ready to become apprentices. Skykit, from this day forward, until you receive your warrior name, you shall be known as Skypaw."

Just hearing the name made Skypaw grin.

"Applewhisker, you will be Skypaw's mentor," Icestar declared.

Skypaw scanned the crowd, watching as the calico she-cat stepped forward. Smiling, Skypaw leapt down the rock, touching her nose to the deputy. It was a great honor to have her as a mentor.

"Cloudkit," Icestar said, turning to the white tom. "From this day forward, until you receive your warrior name, you shall be known as Cloudpaw. Largefoot will mentor you."

Skypaw watched as Cloudpaw ran down the rock to touch noses with gray the tom. He was also a good warrior, loyal too.

"And Petalkit," Icestar said, turning to Skypaw's white-pelted sister. "From this day forward, until you receive your warrior name, you shall be known as Petalpaw. Your mentor will be Snowheart."

Skypaw smiled at her sister as Petalpaw touched noses to the white she-cat, another good warrior.

"SKYPAW! CLOUDPAW! PETALPAW!" the clan cried.

Skypaw smiled, though she frowned only moments later. A couple of weeks had passed since the flood, and although she was an

apprentice, she felt nothing but sadness. There were no signs of Thornpaw or Blackpaw, and the clan had accepted the fact they were dead.

Skypaw tried not to believe the news. Accepting Blackpaw was dead was impossible. It was during these past few weeks she realized she had grown to care for the black tom.

The dens were almost done being rebuilt, and Rosefur had been gone for the past couple of days, said to be going on a patrol along the river and forest to make sure everything was well, but she had returned just in time for the ceremony.

Skypaw watched as Icestar quickly went off after the ceremony. Cats whispered rumors of how Applewhisker had received messages from Sunstar of FoxClan. Skypaw hadn't heard about the clan much, but she assumed they were a good group of cats.

As the sun went down, Skypaw sat in the apprentice den, wishing Blackpaw were sleeping near her. The sound of cats rushing into camp made Skypaw prick her ears.

It was Icestar, padding into camp with Thornpaw and Blackpaw behind her! Just seeing the tom made Skypaw's heat leap.

"BLACKPAW!" she screeched, racing out of the den to greet the tom.

The tom smiled at her, his eyes weary with exhaustion. "Wow, I didn't know you'd be so excited," he laughed.

"I-we," she corrected herself, "missed you a lot," Skypaw told him, looking back at Petalpaw and Cloudpaw.

Blackpaw smiled, padding off with Thornpaw. However, Skypaw was confused. Wasn't he happy to see her?

As she watched the two intertwine tails, it suddenly all made sense. She noticed the way they stared at each other and talked to each other.

They were in love. How could she have been so blind?! Skypaw wanted to run away and hide. Here she had been finally discovering

she had a crush on Blackpaw, when everything had gone down in disaster. She felt ashamed of herself, though she wasn't sure why.

Skypaw let out a cry. Her life had all gone downhill.

In much shock, Skypaw didn't even realize Icestar had yowled for an announcement.

"Skypaw," Petalpaw poked her sister, "Icestar is talking."

Skypaw shook her head, breaking free from her thoughts. She focused her attention on Icestar. Her face was grim. Something had not gone well.

"A great threat has been made," Icestar began. "An evil cat, Moonpaw, from FoxClan wishes war on all of us. We shall head to the meadow to train with FoxClan. We can't risk an attack on the camp. Elders and queens will be coming as well. We'll make sure there's a hideout for you."

Skypaw stood there in shock. What had sounded like a minor threat was definitely a bigger one. This was serious! For the first time, Skypaw hoped her family would head back to their real home. Perhaps it was better for everyone if she left...

The clan spent the rest of the day packing up and heading to the meadow. Her mother hadn't even begin to comfort her or her siblings.

Skypaw trudged along the pathway with Petalpaw.

"What do you think will happen to us?" Petalpaw asked nervously.

"I don't know," Skypaw admitted.

As the sun headed down the horizon, the clan arrived in the meadow, FoxClan already there, awaiting their arrival.

"We'll switch off guards every once in awhile," Icestar announced. "Get some sleep now!"

Skypaw sat down next to her siblings, closing her eyes. Slowly, she

fell into a deep sleep.

Chapter 5

A week or two had passed since the clan's movement into the meadow. Skypaw had been training hard with Applewhisker, and she wondered what normal apprentices her age would've been learning. Her training was exhausting, and now, she was fully aware a battle was on the way.

As Skypaw sat in the meadow, taking a break, she noticed Rosefur padding over to Icestar. Curious, Skypaw padded over. Her mother had been acting strange for awhile, more than usual. Maybe she'd learn what was up.

Leaping into some bushes, Skypaw pricked her ears, listening to the two talking.

"I'm expecting kits, Icestar," Rosefur explained. "I can't train in this battle."

In shock, Skypaw leapt out of the bushes, her eyes wide. "What do you mean you're expecting kits?!" she cried out. "What about us? Who's our father?"

Rosefur stood in shock, surprised Skypaw had been standing so close. She looked at Icestar, then turned back to Skypaw.

"Come on. Let's talk," she said. "PETALPAW! CLOUDPAW!" she yowled, calling them over to her. Confused, the three padded over to a nearby tree to talk to Rosefur.

"This is our home now," Rosefur explained. "We aren't returning to our real home."

"Where is our real home?!" Skypaw growled.

"It's time you kits should know the truth," Rosefur sighed. "You were born in ForestClan."

"ForestClan?" Cloudpaw asked. "Where is it?"

"It's a long way from here," Rosefur explained. "Your father's name is Olivetail. He's a very good cat."

"What does he look like?" Petalpaw asked.

"He's a gray tabby tom with white patches, similar to mine. Now, when you were very young, ForestClan was threatened. Olivetail begged me to take you away so that you could remain safe. He told me to return in three moons. But I didn't. We were traveling at that time. Shortly after we arrived in SnowClan, he found me. Apparently, he had been searching two moons for me. It had been great to see him again, and he was asking all about you. I told him I would remain in SnowClan because it would be better for you kits. I didn't know if we would be accepted back."

"Why not?" Skypaw asked. "We're all from there."

"Well, not really," Rosefur frowned. "But forget about that. He has been in these woods for awhile now, and not too long ago, I met him again. Anyway, we said our goodbyes since he had to return to ForestClan. He told me to think about returning, but I wasn't sure. For now, we will live in SnowClan. Plus, I'm expecting a second litter-your siblings. You should be happy."

Skypaw couldn't help but smile. Her questions had finally been answered.

"Ugh, even *more* siblings?" Cloudpaw complained.

"Oh, stop it!" Petalpaw giggled, pushing him lightly.

Their laughs suddenly turned to screams as a silver-blue she-cat came out of the bushes. Behind here was a large white tom with piercing green eyes and a brown tabby tom. Four kits stood at her paws- a spotted she-cat, a brown striped tom, a dusty brown tom, and a brown tabby she-cat.

The spotted she-cat and striped tom seemed proud, but the other two cowered in fear before the cats. It didn't look as if they were scared of the crowd, but their mother.

"Moonpaw," Skypaw growled, looking into the evil green eyes of the

malicious she-cat.

"Why, hello!"

"WHAT DO YOU WANT, MOONPAW?" Icestar hissed.

Moonpaw shrugged. "I just wanted to introduce a few cats," she told them, walking by. Skypaw cowered in fear as she focused her gaze on her. She could've sworn her eyes flashed red. "First off, my name is Moon*star*," she explained. "Please, meet my mate, Fang."

Skypaw turned, watching as the large brown tabby tom padded forward, staring proudly at the cats.

"My deputy, Bone."

The scary white tom padded forward, a serious expression on his face.

"And my four kits, Hazelkit, Chesnutkit, Tigerkit, and Leopardkit."

The kits padded forward, looking into the crowd.

"The battle won't be for awhile," Moonstar explained. "I'm waiting until my kits are warriors. But, I didn't just come here to explain battle situations and introduce cats. No, I came here to gain control! Leave the forest by sundown today or I will make you."

"You can't drive us out of our territory!" Applewhisker hissed.

Moonstar growled and pinned the she-cat down. The squirmed as Moonstar had her claws out, about to scratch her neck.

Skypaw wanted to cry out to her mentor, but her voice was gone.

"We will leave," Icestar announced.

Moonstar moved away from Applewhisker. "Good," she purred, quickly padding off.

Chapter 6

"Blackpaw, from this day forward, you shall be known as Blacktail. And Thonrpaw, from this day forward, you shall be known as Thorndapple!" Icestar yowled.

"MAPLELEAF! BLACKTAIL! THORNDAPPLE!" the clan cried.

Blacktail, Thorndapple, and Thorndapple's sister, Mapleleaf, were all becoming SnowClan warriors today. It had been one week since Moonstar had threatened them, and now, FoxClan and SnowClan were traveling together to search for a new home.

As the cats parted, Skypaw knew Blacktail had asked Thorndapple to become mates. Skypaw had tried to act happy for Blacktail. She only wanted the best for him. But of course, inside she felt nothing but pain.

As the cats continued on their journey, Skypaw stuck with her sister, playing games along the way while trying to ignore the long journey that lay ahead.

The two stood beside Rosefur, who seemed to struggle a little. Cloudpaw was with Dovepaw, of course, chatting with her. Skypaw only hoped this tireless journey would end soon.

As another week passed, Skypaw was awoken by a high pitched scream from Snowheart, one of their eldest warriors.

"BLACKTAIL IS INJURED!" she shrieked.

Skypaw suddenly jolted awake, gasping as the injured black tom was brought inside the cave. Judging by his wounds, it did not look good, and Skypaw sat in her nest, watching nervously.

"I'll fix him up right away," Nightclaw, their medicine cat, reassured the clan. He began to tend to the unconscious Blacktail along with his apprentice, Spottedpaw.

Skypaw padded towards the back of the den to make sure the tom was okay.

"What happened to him?" Skypaw asked Nightclaw.

The black and white tom shrugged.

"I'm not sure. We'll have to wait for him to tell his story. He's in pretty bad shape right now. Let's pray to StarClan he survives," Nightclaw told her.

Skypaw quivered in fear at the thought of losing the black tom. No, she would make sure he survived. It was her job to make sure he was always happy. She had to promise herself this.

She waited with the tom for hours until finally, he opened his eyes.

"Thorndapple," he muttered.

Skypaw looked around the den, remembering Nightwhisker was gone gathering some herbs.

Skypaw turned, eyeing Blacktail. "No, it's just me, Skypaw. What happened?"

Blacktail carefully sat up, his eyes gleaming with sadness.

"Be careful now," Skypaw warned.

Blacktail was much larger than her, and she didn't need him falling on top of her.

Blacktail let out a few coughs before eventually speaking. "Well, you see," he began. "There was this cat, Wolfpelt, and I think he's stolen Thorndapple's heart."

Skypaw tried not to smile. Maybe now she could be with the tom! Maybe Thorndapple and Blacktail would stop being mates. Unfortunately though, he continued.

"And well, she got mad at me for yelling at him. I knew what he was doing, but Thorndapple was completely clueless. She was about

to tell me something, but she wouldn't after I yelled. She went off with Wolfpelt, and I begged her to come back. I was mouse-brained and jumped off a cliff to prove my love, but she didn't come back. She called me a 'stupid tom' and left with that piece of fox-dung. And now, I think I know what she was going to tell me," he sighed. "She may be expecting my kits."

Skypaw tried not to burst into tears. She was upset for Blacktail because he had worked so hard and yet received no love. And she wanted to cry at the fact he was going to be a father. She could never be mates with him now, even if she continued loving him.

"I'll find her," Skypaw growled. She was going to give Thorndapple a piece of her mind. Here, Skypaw had only shown love to Blacktail, but instead he had chosen Thorndapple who showed no love at all.

"No, you don't have-"

"No," Skypaw cut him off. "I *will* find her *and* bring her back hear," she said, scurrying out of the cave before she could hear Blacktail's response.

The storm that had been going on earlier had now stopped, and the sun was shining brightly through the gray clouds. Skypaw traced the nearby cliff where Blacktail had last seen his mate, and she now sniffed for the newly warrior's scent.

The rain had washed most of it away, though Skypaw could still vaguely make out her scent. Skypaw began walking across the damp ground, looking for the two loves.

She suddenly stopped as she came forward. The wet grass became mud, and she could easily detect pawprints. She sniffed the ground, recognizing Thorndapple's scent and another one she had never smelled before.

She followed them quietly, making sure if they were nearby, they couldn't hear her. She walked for several minutes until she came to a meadow where the two sat.

The brown tabby she-cat and gray tom were sitting in the grass near each other, laughing and mewing. Skypaw slowly crouched down in the tall grass, ready to move forward, when a noise startled her.

"Skypaw, what are you doing?"

Skypaw turned, turning to see her brother, Cloudpaw.

"Cloudpaw, why are you here?" she whispered.

"I saw you leave the cave," he said quietly. "I didn't know where you were going, so I came after you."

Skypaw groaned. The last thing she needed was her brother coming after her.

"Okay, but be quiet, please. I'm supposed to convince Thorndapple to get away from this tom to come see Blacktail."

"Ooh, is this a love war or something?" Cloudpaw swueaked.

"Sort of," she replied. "Be quiet, please."

Being quiet was utterly impossible. Skypaw would be quiet and swift while Cloudpaw managed to step on every stick and leaf. As they inched towards the couple, Skypaw finally gave up.

She began to run towards them. Thorndapple turned and stared at her, wide-eyed, while Wolfpelt looked confused.

"THORNDAPPLE!" she screeched.

"Yeah, Thorndapple!" Cloudpaw echoed.

"Who are these cats?" Wolfpelt asked.

"These are some apprentices in my clan. I played with them as kits, and we trained together for a short time. Skypaw, Cloudpaw, why are you here?"

"To convince you to come back and leave the ugly tom!" Cloudpaw growled.

Skypaw slapped him with her tail, the piece of mouse-dung.

Thorndapple rolled her eyes. "What now? More about Blacktail?"

Skypaw growled at the she-cat. "We found him after he jumped off the cliff to show he *loved* you! He's badly injured, and he probably won't make it! Are you going to say good-bye to your *mate* or not?!"

Wolfpelt looked disgusted at Skypaw, and Skypaw glared at him. Ignorant tom.

"Why should I?" Thorndapple hissed.

"Because he did nothing, but love you! And you traded that for him!" She pointed to Wolfpelt. Skypaw glared at him once more.

Once Wolfpelt saw how sad Thorndapple looked, he lost his angry face.

"Wolfpelt, I'm sorry," she began.

"No, I understand," he began. "Your mate needs you. Forget about me. I was being a mouse-brain. Go to him, Thorndapple."

Thorndapple nodded and the three walked rushed back to the cave.

When they returned, Blacktail laid asleep on his nest. Thorndapple rushed over and sat down next to him, beginning to lick his face.

"Thorndapple," he muttered as he opened his eyes. "Thorndapple!" he exclaimed, recognizing the she-cat.

"I'm sorry," Thorndapple sighed. "I shouldn't have done that."

The two began to talk to each other while Skypaw sat alone off to the side.

"Thank you, Skypaw," Blacktail said at last. Skypaw let out a soft smile, glad he at least thought of her as a good friend.

"Now, Thorndapple, what were you going to ask me earlier?" he asked his mate.

"I'm expecting your kits," she smiled.

The bomb dropped on Skypaw hard. It was hard not to be happy for their celebration, but Skypaw also felt hurt. Blacktail wasn't her mate, so she shouldn't have been upset, but she managed to show a weak smile before she padded back to her nest to sleep.

Chapter 7

"Skypaw! Skypaw, wake up!" came the frantic voice of her sister.

Skypaw opened her eyes, tired of paws pushing against her. She looked up to see her sister, her eyes glazed with tears.

"What happened?!" Skypaw gasped. "Did a cat die?!"

Petalpaw shook her head and looked down.

"No, something much worse," she mewed sadly.

It's about Blacktail, isn't it? Skypaw thought. But she was surprised to find out that her sister's response had nothing to do with Blacktail at all.

"Rosefur is afraid of Moonstar," Petalpaw explained. "She doesn't want Moonstar to attack the clan, and she doesn't want to put herself or her future kits in danger. She left to ForestClan!"

"What?!" Skypaw shouted. She was outraged! Her mother, whom she had looked up to all her life, whom she had cared and admired, was a coward! Moons ago she had promised to return home, and now she was without them!

Skypaw began to sob, feeling Petalpaw's tail gently rub her back in an attempt to coax her.

"She promised she would return to our new home. She said Daddy would bring her there. He knows his away around these woods," Petalpaw explained.

Skypaw nodded sadly. At that moment, she had fully appreciated her sister. Her sister was the only one who had been there for her, and at that moment, she promised to be there for her if she were ever in trouble.

Her only true family was her brother and sister. They were the only

ones who kept promises.

As a moon passed and the clan arrived back at their home, Skypaw gave up any hope that her mother would return soon. And she was perfectly fine with that. She knew where her loyalties lied.

The sound of the crunching of leaves made Skypaw prick her ears one morning. It had to be just another cat, but she felt as if maybe, just maybe, it was her mother. She crept towards the edge of the den, peeking out. Her heart raced at what she saw.

"PETALPAW! CLOUDPAW!" Skypaw shrieked to her siblings sleeping nearby.

The two stirred, getting up slowly. As they gazed out of the den, they gasped.

"MOTHER!" the three shouted, racing out of the den. Rosefur had kept her promise. She had returned after all.

Two small kits stood beside her. One was a black and white tom while the other was a gray and white she-cat that looked similar to Rosefur.

The three smiled at Rosefur, but she did not smile back. She walked towards the nursery in silence while holding one kit by the scruff and the other on her back.

Confused, Skypaw followed her mother inside. Thorndapple sat in the corner, her belly swollen. She would be giving birth shortly.

"What beautiful kits!" Thorndapple exclaimed as Rosefur padded inside.

"What are they called?" Petalpaw asked curiously.

Her mother looked at her. "The tom is Smokekit," she announced, pointing to the black and white tom. "The she-cat is Mousekit," she explained.

They nodded, smiling at the two kits. As Skypaw looked at her mother closer though, she realized her red eyes, swollen from

crying.

Something wasn't right. Skypaw gasped as she remembered her mother's words. Her father was supposed to return with Rosefur. Where was he?

"Why are you so sad, Mother?" Cloudpaw asked.

"You must understand that you are not allowed to tell *any* cat, not even Smokekit and Mousekit, about what I will tell you," she whispered, leading them out of the nursery. "I don't want my new kits to find this out unless they positively need to know. Promise you won't tell?"

They nodded.

"Good," Rosefurs ighed in relief. "I made it to ForestClan successfully. I met your father, and he was overjoyed to see me. He was surprised too as I explained how an evil cat had been taking over our clan and I was scared for our kits. I gave birth to three kits."

"But there were only--" Cloudpaw began.

"Shush!" Petalpaw shouted.

"Smokekit and Mousekit. There was a gray tabby she-cat too named Oceankit. Shortly after their birth, the forest caught on fire. I had to evacuate the den as possible. Olivetail grabbed Oceankit and I grabbed Mousekit and Smokekit. He told me he would meet me where the fire stopped. I ran for miles with my kits, and soon, the flames disappeared behind me. I called out for Olivetail and Oceankit, but there was no response. I even waited there a few days, but no one came. I assumed they would be meeting in SnowClan, so I came here. Yet, I doubt they'll come!"

At that moment, Rosefur burst into tears.

"It's okay, Mother," Petalpaw soothed. "They'll come. You'll see."

Rosefur nodded slowly. "If they don't return, I don't want to hear one word about this again, okay?"

Skypaw nodded and padded off. Her poor mother...

Chapter 8

"MY KITS ARE COMING!" a scream erupted from the nursery. Immediately, Skypaw recognized it as Thorndapple. She knew her kits had been due any day, though Skypaw had really wanted nothing to do with them.

As Skypaw watched Blacktail rushed by, she tried to make her way towards the nursery, hoping to catch a glimpse of Blacktail welcoming his new kits. She supposed watching his smile would make up for the pain and heartache.

Skypaw heard growling as Nightwhisker told her to stay out. Blacktail stood by Skypaw, stomping his black paws on the ground impatiently.

"Don't worry," Skypaw looked up at him. "The kits will be lovely."

Blacktail had not even noticed her until that moment. He managed a small smile, sitting next to Skypaw for several minutes until Spottedpaw motioned him in. Skypaw crept along the side of the den and peeked her head in, curious to see what was happening.

She saw to kits. One was a golden brown tabby she-cat while the other was a black tom. Thorndapple sat by them, wailing.

"Thorndapple, what's the matter?" Blacktail asked.

Skypaw rolled her eyes. It was as if the tom didn't realize how beautiful the moment was. Her tears had to be from the happiness. Thorndapple's response was completely opposite.

"One of the kits died!" she wailed, pointing to the black tom.

Skypaw gasped, backing away. There had been no way to prevent this from happening, but she felt like she had failed her promise.

She tried to ignore the wails as Blacktail as Spottedpaw carried the dead kit out of the den to bury it. Once the wailing had stopped,

Skypaw heard the distant mumble of the two talking.

"What will we call the she-cat?" Blacktail asked.

"Lilykit," Thorndapple declared. Skypaw sighed, realizing Blacktail would now probably cut off connection with her forever.

Skypaw awoke that night to see her sister gone. Her nest was cold, leaving Skypaw confused. Where would Petalpaw go?

Skypaw gazed outside, watching as the moon and stars shined brightly. It was a perfect night to see the forest and its surroundings.

Still, Skypaw couldn't understand why Petalpaw had disappeared. Before she could think anymore, she drifted back to sleep.

As the sun came up the next morning, Skypaw awakened to find Petalpaw back in her nest, sound asleep. The other apprentices were already up, heading off with their mentors.

"Petalpaw, wake up!" Skypaw shouted, poking her sister.

Petalpaw lazily opened her eyes and yawned.

"Petalpaw, you're never late. Have you been feeling well?" Skypaw asked. She didn't want to bring up how her nest had been empty. Perhaps the darkness had confused Skypaw's vision.

Petalpaw let out a huge yawn. "I didn't sleep well last night."

"How come?"

Petalpaw shrugged and padded outside, Skypaw following behind her sister. She had to admit, she was suspicious. What could Petalpaw possibly be up to?

As they were assigned to patrols, she and Petalpaw were sent on the same. Her sister lagged behind the rest of the group, and Skypaw padded slowly by her.

"Petalpaw, keep up!" Icestar growled.

"I'll wait behind with her," Skypaw told Icestar.

Icestar nodded, continuing to walk.

Once the clan was far enough behind so no one could hear them, Skypaw began to speak.

"I'm not stupid, Petalpaw," she said at last. "Your nest was empty last night. Where were you?" she whispered.

"I guess I can't lie to you," Petalpaw sighed. "I was meeting a handsome tom."

"A cat in our clan? FoxClan? *MoonClan?!"* Moonstar had not kept her promise and had followed the clan to the new forest. They now sat in the foothills, keeping an eye on the clans. It was more dangerous than ever.

"None of the ones you listed," Petalpaw replied.

"You were meeting a rogue?!" Skypaw screeched so loudly that Largefoot turned around.

"Sh, not so loud!" Petalpaw whispered as he turned back around. "His name is Rockpelt, and he's not a rogue. He just doesn't have a home."

"That's called a rogue," Skypaw hissed. She couldn't hide the shock. Her sister was disobeying the warrior code!

"Well, he was a clan cat. I mean, he told me he came from ForestClan. He must've escaped from the fire as well. I met him on patrol yesterday, and I swear, I loved him when I made eye contact with him," she exclaimed quietly.

"Petalpaw, you're breaking the rules," Skypaw groaned.

"I know, Skypaw, but it's true love. What would you do?" she asked.

Skypaw wanted to reply that she would make the right choice, but she knew she loved Blacktail, and if he were another clan cat, she couldn't say she would still make the right choice. She kept her

mouth shut and continued to pad along by her sister.

"Please don't be mad at me," Petalpaw pleaded. "You won't tell Icestar, will you?"

Petalpaw had been loyal and faithful to her. Skypaw knew she had to do the same.

"Fine, but when you sneak out, make sure it's less obvious."

Petalpaw nodded excitedly and caught up with the rest of the patrol.

Chapter 9

Skypaw had left eariler in the morning, watching as Smokekit and Mousekit wrestled around. She loved her younger brother and sister, and seeing them play made her grin.

After coming back from apprentice training, news spread quickly of Mousekit, Lilykit, and Smokekit's disappearance.

Frightened, Skypaw searched throughout the camp, suddenly getting cut off by a screech.

"MY KIT!" It was Rosefur, screeching loudly. The noise came from the medicine cat den in a large, booming sound. "FIX MY KIT!"

Skypaw turned to Petalpaw and Cloudpaw, and the three quickly padded towards the den. As Skypaw peeked inside, she let out a gasp. Laying in a nest was their sister, Mousekit. Her fur was coated in blood, and her eyes were closed. She remained motionless, not the slightest movement coming from her. Smokekit sat crouched in the corner, looking down.

"I've already told you this, Rosefur," Nightwhisker tried to say as calmly as he could. "Mousekit is dead! There's nothing I can do!"

Skypaw felt her stomach drop, and she let out a moan at the news of Mousekit's death.

"What kind of medicine cat are you?!" she hissed. She then turned to Smokekit in a rage. "YOU! YOU DID THIS! Why did you go into the forest?! You know how dangerous it is!"

Smokekit shrunk down, ashamed.

"I-I didn't know," he mewed quietly.

Rosefur swatted at her kit and ran off. Petalpaw and Cloudpaw quickly ran after their mother, leavingt Skypaw to watch over her brother.

His blue eyes were glazed with diamond tears.

"I didn't mean to," he began, looking up at Skypaw.

Skypaw shushed him and grabbed some cobwebs from Nightwhisker's stash, beginning to clean the claw mark down his cheek.

"Come with me," she said softly, leading him outside of the den. She led him to the front of the apprentice den where they sat down.

"What happened?" Skypaw asked.

Smokekit looked down before answering.

"Well, Lilykit and I thought it would be fun to go out into the forest. Mousekit didn't want to go, but we called her a coward, and she decided to come. We weren't there that long, honestly. A big, white cat named Bone came out of the bushes. He reeked of MoonClan, and he was really scary."

"I bet he was," Skypaw sighed.

"I called him a few names because I didn't think he'd hurt a kit, but he clawed me," he whimpered, turning to show Skypaw a large claw mark that crept down his hip, though it had just been tended by Nightwhisker.

"Mousekit got angry, and she bit his ear. There was a small chink missing in his hear, and then he-he attacked her. A fox came out of the bushes, and I thought it was going to kill us, but it scared Bone off. The fox looked at Mousekit's wounds, and Mousekit died in the fox's arms. The fox spoke cat, Skypaw! It was trying to help Mousekit! But Mousekit died, and the fox left. And we came back here..."

A cat-speaking fox? It sounded pretty unrealistic.

"Rosefur said she's never going to forgive me," Smokekit whimpered.

Skypaw sighed and wrapped her tail around the tom. "Well, I still

love you, Smokekit. It wasn't your fault, but you should definitely stay out of the forest. It's too dangerous to enter right now."

After the words came out of her mouth, Skypaw froze. She knew Petalpaw sometimes snuck out into the woods at night. Skypaw had to warn her of the dangers.

Smokekit curled up against his sister and fell asleep. Skypaw smiled at the white and black tom, and for once, she didn't think about Blacktail.

Chapter 10

As the battle came closer and closer, so did the date that Skypaw and her siblings would become warriors. Skypaw bounced with excitement at the very thought of becoming a warrior. She wanted nothing more than to serve her clan with honor.

Rosefur had unfortunately continued to reject Smokekit, but Skypaw and her siblings had been there for her brother, and they had bonded quickly.

Skypaw sat in the camp in the morning, sharing a squirrel with her sister. Petalpaw still had continued to sneak out to see Rockpelt, though they met closer to the camp to avoid running into any MoonClan warriors.

Hearing a rustle of bushes, Skypaw pricked her ears and saw Smokekit pad forward, a beautiful gray tabby kit and silver-blue kit following behind him.

Skypaw stood up, ready to lecture the tom about going into the forest when a gasp came from Rosefur.

"OCEANKIT?! IS THAT YOU?!"

The small gray tabby kit looked up at Rosefur in confusion.

"Who are you?" she asked curiously.

Skypaw closed her mouth, knowing exactly who Oceankit was. It was the missing kit that Rosefur had mentioned moons ago.

Smokekit seemed as confused as Oceankit and the older kit standing next to her.

"It's me, Rosefur. Your mother," she spoke gently.

Oceankit's eyes widened, and Smokekit opened his mouth to speak, though no words came out.

"I FOUND YOU!" she screeched.

Oceankit and Rosefur danced for joy while Smokekit stood there, utterly confused. The silver-blue she-cat standing next to Smokekit let out an uneasy smile towards the black and white tom.

"What's going on?!" the silver-blue she-cat yowled.

Rosefur growled, beginning to tell Smokekit and the she-cat the story of how she had left with Mousekit and Smokekit while Oceankit and Olivetail planned to meet her. Smokekit looked down at the ground, saddened.

Skypaw knew his exact thoughts. Oceankit's return meant he would be replaced forever.

But Oceankit joined her brother in sorrow and looked up sadly at her mother.

"It's my turn to tell stories now," she explained. "Olivetail took me away, but he didn't survive. The fire got him, and he told me to run off."

Skypaw winced. Burning alive did not sound like a good way to die.

"But then I met Wavekit," she explained, pointing at the she-cat. "She took care of me, and I would've be alive without her."

"Thank you, Wavekit," Rosefur grinned. She nuzzled her daughter and went off with Wavekit and Oceankit to speak to Icestar.

"Smokekit," Petalpaw began.

Smokekit let out a mew, and he turned, his watery eyes gazing into Petalpaw's.

"I know I'll be replaced now," he sighed. "And I know I'll never be forgiven. No one will love me, not ever."

"Don't you say that!" Skypaw snapped. "You *know* your life is wonderful. I love you, Smokekit. Petalpaw loves you! Cloudpaw loves you! We're a family, and we will always love you. You have so

many friends, Smokekit. Think positive."

Smokekit let out a faint smile. "Thanks, Skypaw. I feel kind of better."

"And if the situation progresses, it wouldn't be a bad idea to tell Oceankit the truth about Rosefur and Mousekit."

Chapter 11

"Today, we gather to make three new warriors and four new apprentices," Icestar yowled, her large voice ringing through the SnowClan camp.

Skypaw and her siblings bounced with excitement as they stood near the rock. Smokekit, Oceankit, Lilykit, and Wavekit would become apprentices today, while Skypaw and her siblings became warriors.

"Cloudpaw," she began, turning to face Skypaw's brother. "You are loyal and strong. From this day forward, you shall be known as Cloudfur!" she announced.

Skypaw's paws tingled as she wondered what her warrior name would be.

"Petalpaw," Icestar spoke, turning towards the white she-cat. "You are soft and caring, but you aren't afraid to demonstrate your skills. From this day forward, you shall be known as Petalnose!"

Skypaw's heart raced as Icestar finally turned towards her.

"And Skypaw, you are compassionate and loyal. From this day forward, you shall be known as Skycloud!"

"CLOUDFUR! PETALNOSE! SKYCLOUD!" The clan's yowls rang through the camp. Skycloud smiled at her clanmate's friendly faces, proud to be standing with her siblings.

She zoned out as the apprentice ceremony began, thinking of everything she would do as a warrior. She'd go on patrols, hunt, fight in battles. She was no longer the tiny kit that padded through the woods with her siblings and mother.

As the crowd finally drew away, Blacktail came up to Skycloud with a grin on his face.

"Great job," he congratulated her, his green eyes gleaming with happiness.

Since Applewhisker was expecting kits, Blacktail had taken over the role of deputy in SnowClan. She knew he'd prove to be a good leader. She always assumed he was a leader in his heart.

He and Thorndapple, however, had begun to fight often, and Blacktail had begun to stray by her side a little more than usual.

"Uh, Skycloud," Petalnose interrupted. "Can I talk to you for a second?"

Skycloud looked behind her shoulder and waved good-bye to Blacktail before following Petalnose behind the warriors den into some bushes.

Petalnose suddenly began to burst into tears before Skycloud could even ask.

"Petalnose, what hap--" She was cut off by her sister's wail.

"I'm sorry! Everything is going wrong for me! It's all my fault! I've brought shame to the clan!" she cried.

"Petalnose, I don't even know what you're talking about! You're incredibly loyal to SnowClan! Now, tell me what happened." Skycloud paused, then suddenly felt sick to her stomach. "It's about Rockclaw, isn't it?"

Petalnose nodded sadly. Once her tears began to subside, she began to talk.

"I'm expecting his kits," she whimpered.

Skycloud gasped. Her sister, a traitor?!

"What will you tell the clan?!"

"I'm telling them the truth," Petalnose scowled. "Please, let me tell my story."

Skycloud remained quiet and waited for her sister to speak.

"Last night, I planned to meet him again to tell him the news, but-but...He rejected me! He met some other cat named Hazelnose from FoxClan and they became mates! He just left me! He didn't even want to hear the news!"

"That's horrible!" Skycloud gasped. A sudden realization hit her. "Wait, Hazelnose? Didn't Moonstar have a kit named Hazelpaw or something?"

Petalnose buried her claws into the ground in a rage. "Yes! She and her brother joined FoxClan because they weren't evil! BUt that she-cat still is! She stole *my* mate!"

A sudden rustle came from the bushes, and Smokepaw and Oceanpaw tumbled out. Petalnose gasped and turned towards her siblings.

"Please, don't tell!" she begged.

Oceanpaw laughed. "Don't worry, sis, we won't. The Clan will know anyway."

Petalnose nodded. "I have to speak to Icestar now. I will take whatever punishment she gives me."

"What if you're exiled?!" Smokepaw exclaimed.

"Then I will leave," Petalnose replied, refusing to make eye contact with Skycloud.

"No, I would never let her exile you, Petalnose! Never!" Skycloud began to cry.

Petalnose looked at her sister with those sad blue and green eyes. "If I am exiled, I will take the punishment. I am loyal to my clan, and I always will be."

The white she-cat began to walk towards camp, leaving Skycloud speechless.

She only wished she could have as much bravery as her sister.

Chapter 12

After talking to Icestar, Petalnose had not been exiled, but she still had received a punishment. Still, helping the elders did not seem like such a big deal.

Skycloud assumed Icestar would've assigned a greater punishment if it wasn't for Petalnose's bravery and loyalty. She guessed she might've been exiled.

"SHE'S MISSING! WHERE IS SHE?!" Rosefur's yowl suddenly came from the center of the camp.

"Who?" Blacktail asked.

Rosefur growled, refusing to face the tom. "OCEANPAW! I CAN'T FIND HER ANYWHERE!"

"I'll send out a patrol immediately," Blacktail said, calling cats. In a matter of minutes, they were off, Rosecloud following behind.

"Smokepaw is gone too," Petalnose quickly told Skycloud. Her eyes widened.

"I'm sorry, Petalnose, but I have to find him!" she screeched, running off towards the patrol as she left her pregnant sister behind.

The patrol had not gone far, and within a few minutes, Skycloud had quickly caught up. She walked behind her frantic mother, hoping to find her two siblings. It was only a matter of time before Moonstar got them.

"We'll never find her," Rosefur wailed. Angry, Skycloud stomped on her mother's tail.

"You mean we'll never find *them?!*" she hissed at her mother. Rosefur's eyes widened.

"Your son is missing too! Rosefur, you can't blame him for

Mousekit's death!"

"Yes, I can," she snorted. "I'm doing it right now." She began to walk again, yowling as Skycloud's paw came down on her tail again.

"Mother, look at me!" she hissed.

Rosefur turned, growling at Skycloud.

"When we were kits, you left Olivetail and ForestClan," Skycloud explained, "but you still loved us no matter how sad we were. You never favored one over the other. Smokepaw is depressed right now, and it's all your fault! Just give him another chance! He's out in the forest again, but this time, with Oceanpaw. So when we find them, punish them both."

Rosefur looked down, letting out a sigh. "I'll try to be a good mother. I'll forgive Smokepaw when we find them. And..." she looked up, pain in her eyes, "I'll try to treat them equally."

Skycloud smiled at her mother. "Good."

Blacktail and Thorndapple stood next to each other, Lilypaw at their side. Skycloud knew Lilypaw loved Smokepaw, but she also knew that Wavepaw had feelings for the tom as well. There was no telling what would happen.

As Skycloud caught up with the others, she smiled at Blacktail, who returned the favor.

"We should camp out here for the night," Blacktail announced. As the cats curled up next to each other, Skycloud snuggled near her mother's side. Rosefur was still much bigger than her, and Skycloud supposed she always would be.

Feeling her mother's warm pelt against hers reminded her of those nights in the woods as kits. She was glad to have her mother by her side.

Yawning, Skycloud fell asleep and became haunted by nightmares, watching as her family was killed by Moonstar over and over again. Even Blacktail appeared in them too.

Skycloud awoke frantically, finding sunlight. All the other cats had woken up by now and were busy preparing for another day's journey.

Skycloud quickly rose to her feet and went off with the other cats, walking for hours by her mother's side.

As the afternoon came, Rosefur immediately stopped near a pile of bushes.

"What's wrong, Rosefur?" Skycloud asked.

"This is the ForestClan border," Rosefur explained. "I haven't been here since--" She stopped talking, holding back tears.

"It's okay, Mother. Smokepaw and Oceanpaw must be nearby. Their scents are strong here. Come on, let's walk."

The cats made their way through the territory, approaching the camp. As they came nearer, Skycloud could hear distant voices.

"Well, if that is your decision," a deep, male voice came.

Skycloud popped through the bushes to see Smokepaw and Oceanpaw looking at an older brown tabby tom who she assumed was the leader of ForestClan.

"I FOUND THEM!" she shouted, turning to find no cat behind her. Curious, Skycloud was about to call out when she heard a familiar yowl.

"ROSEFUR!" she screeched, racing towards the screech. Her mother was lying on the ground, metal clasped to her fur, squeezing tightly at the she-cat's side. Blood dripped down, and Rosefur cried out in pain. She was caught in a fox trap.

The cats quickly tried to pry the metal off, but it was no use. Her mother would die. Skycloud stared at the bloody she-cat, trying not to cry.

Suddenly, Smokepaw and Oceanpaw burst through the bushes, gasping to find their mother.

"MOTHER!" Oceanpaw screeched, Smokepaw beside her.

"Rosefur," Skycloud began, but she stopped.

"I know," she gagged. "I will die. I love you, Skycloud, and your siblings," she gulped in pain, turning to face Smokepaw, looking right past Oceanpaw.

"Smokepaw, I-I'm so sorry," she cried. She then turned towards her daughter. "I love you too, Oceanpaw. Olivetail and Mousekit will b-be here soon to collect me," she stammered.

Skycloud and Smokepaw burst into tears as Rosefur's beautiful white and gray pelt became drenched in red. The she-cat's eyes closed slowly, and her breathing froze.

Skycloud fell over at the sight of her dead mother, light fading.

When Skycloud awoke, she awoke in a den, away from the carcass of her mother. She opened her eyes, Blacktail and Smokepaw leaning over her.

"What happened?" she asked.

"You passed out after Rosefur died," Blacktail explained.

"Blacktail carried you to this den to rest. We're almost back to SnowClan," Smokepaw explained.

Skycloud's heart warmed at the thought of Blacktail carrying her, but she didn't want to return. She didn't want to look at her siblings and explain the grim news of their mother's death.

"Thanks," she mumbled, standing up. She joined the patrol, padding back to camp.

As they came into the SnowClan camp, Petalnose quickly raced towards Oceanpaw and Smokepaw grinning. She then looked up at Skycloud, her eyes bright and happy.

"You found them!" exclaimed Petalnose.

But Skycloud didn't smile. Cloudfur came over, his eyes turning dull as he realized who was missing.

"Where's--" Cloudfur was cut off by Skycloud.

"SHE GOT CAUGHT IN A FOX TRAP! I stayed with her until she died! It's all my fault!" she wailed.

"What?! Rosefur is dead?!" Petalnose gasped, beginning to stagger. Cloudfur caught his sister, trying to hold tears back.

Cloudfur's mate, Dovewing, and Icestar came over.

"She's truly dead?" Dovewing asked sadly.

Skycloud nodded, tears in her eyes.

Icestar looked down too, seeming the most upset. Skycloud didn't understand why. She heard Icestar mumble something about the she-cat being a strong kit, but perhaps she misheard her.

Skycloud and her siblings sat together, looking into the blue sky, hoping Rosefur was somehow watching them.

Chapter 13

With the battle of MoonClan in a few days, Skycloud couldn't sleep. She was worried about herself, her family. What if her family died in battle? She would never forgive herself.

And then the worst thoughts came to mind. What if Blacktail was killed? Skycloud shook her head. She had to push these pessimistic thoughts away.

A sudden yowl rang from the nursery--Petalnose. Her kits must've been coming.

Skycloud rushed into the nursery, as did Nightwhisker, followed by Cloudfur and Oceanpaw. Petalnose sat, her stomach swollen as she yowled in pain.

"Your kits are coming," Nightwhisker explained, as if Petalnose already didn't know.

Petalnose yowled in pain as Skycloud stood next to her, waiting for her sister to give birth. She tried to calm her sister, though the effort didn't really work.

Minutes passed, when suddenly, a white and gray she-cat was born.

Petalnose sighed in relief, tears flooding her eyes.

"IS that all?" she asked.

Nightwhisker nodded.

Petalnose turned, looking down at her one precious kit.

"She's a beautiful kit," Skycloud assured her. Perhaps she was, or perhaps it was because she reminded her of Rosefur with the white and gray pelt. Skycloud almost expected her to name the she-cat after her mother.

"I'll call her Mintkit," Petalnose decided.

Skycloud smiled at her sister and newborn kit. Together, she let the mother and daughter rest while she headed back to sleep.

"TIME FOR BATTLE!" came a call from Icestar.

Skycloud nervously got out of her nest. Petalnose would not be participating in battle, but Smokepaw, Oceanpaw, and Cloudfur would. She knew Cloudfur could handle herself, but she did not want the apprentices going through such a bloody battle.

Skycloud poked her head in the nursery. Petalnose's eyes were red and swollen from crying.

"What if you don't come back?" she whimpered.

Skycloud sighed. "Petalnose, I *will* come back tonight. I promise. We'll all come back. Each and every one."

Skycloud only wished she could believe herself, but she knew not all of the cats could survive. Petalnose nodded slowly as Mintkit turned to her mother.

"Why so sad, Mama?" she asked.

Skycloud couldn't take it. She raced out of the den, heading towards the meadow.

Skycloud stood by Blacktail's side the entire time, letting out a friendly smile.

The cats soon arrived at the meadow where FoxClan and MoonClan were already waiting. Moonstar padded forward.

Skycloud found it amazing for a cat so small to be so commanding and powerful.

"TODAY, WE WIN FOR MOONCLAN!" Moonstar declared. "LET THE BATTLE BEGIN!"

Cats suddenly rushed towards each other rapidly, yowling at the top

of their lungs. Skycloud didn't even have time to breathe before she was knocked down by a golden tom. Quickly, she pushed him off and clawed at his tail, running off to avoid getting killed.

She glanced around, noticing Blacktail viciously fighting a white she-cat. Smokepaw and Oceanpaw fought together while Cloudfur fought alongside Dovewing.

Suddenly, she was knocked over by a white she-cat.

Skycloud gulped and struggled, but the she-cat had her pinned. Suddenly, a yowl came, and the she-cat was thrown off by Blacktail, Was she mistaken, or had Blacktail just saved her pelt?

The she-cat rushed off and a black she-cat who looked no more than six moons bit into Blacktail's tail.

Suddenly, a gray tom ran over.

"I'll get this kit!" he declared.

The brown she-cat next to him smiled. "Good job, Rockclaw!"

Skycloud suddenly felt anger burst inside her. This was the cat who had ruined Petalnose's life. The kit bit at Rockclaw's neck, but it was dead in a matter of seconds as Rockclaw struck it.

Skycloud stood, looking over the dead kit as they ran off. A warrior never killed.

Skycloud looked up as she heard Rockclaw cry out. She only watched as he collapsed, dead.

"Rockclaw!" the she-cat burst into tears, suddenly pulled into battle.

Skycloud ran off, leaving Petalnose's dead ex-mate to the side. At that moment, she noticed Oceanpaw.

"YOU! YOU KILLED MY KIT!" The same white she-cat who attacked Skycloud stood before Oceanpaw.

"No, I never--"

Skycloud knew something was wrong. She took a step forward, gasping as the she-cat bit into Oceanpaw's neck. Just like that, it was over.

"NO!" Skycloud screeched, clawing at the she-cat until she ran off. Skycloud quickly grabbed her dead sister's body, running towards some bushes.

She frantically tried to wake her sister, but the she-cat was dead.

"I'm so sorry, Oceanpaw," she whispered. "This should've never happened!"

The battle went on as Skycloud dug a grave for her sister. As she placed her small body into the hole, Skycloud let one last tear drop on the grave. She covered the hole back up, only to hear the fighting freeze.

"STOP!" Lilypaw yowled from a tall rock. "STOP!"

Moonstar growled at the apprentice. "WHAT NOW?!" she exclaimed.

"WHAT ARE YOU ALL DOING?!" Lilypaw gasped. "THERE IS NO NEED TO FIGHT! PLEASE, WE CAN SOLVE THIS!"

Moonstar padded up the top of the rock, Blacktail and Thorndapple approaching the she-cat, trying to protect their daughter.

"There is no way to solve this without death!" she yowled. "Right, MoonClan?"

A yowl of agreement came from the vicious members.

Skycloud watched as Moonstar turned, facing the golden-brown she-cat.

She's dead, Skycloud thought, watching as Moonstar slashed at the she-cat's face. Lilypaw stood, refusing to move. She accepted the cut like a true warrior.

Thorndapple and Blacktail leapt up, attempting to knock Moonstar away. Moonstar quickly pushed them away, laughing.

"You can't defeat me!" she laughed, raising her claw to kill both Blacktail and Thorndapple.

"No," Skycloud whispered in unison as Lilypaw shouted, "NO!"

Lilypaw shoved Moonstar with a great amount of force. Then, it all ended. Moonstar's head cracked against the rock, and her limp body fell to the ground. Dead.

The other MoonClan cats quickly retreated and escaped from their dead leader, leaving SnowClan and FoxClan to rejoice.

Skycloud returned to the nursery. Her leg was badly cut, but other than that, she was fine. Everyone seemed to be okay, except Oceanpaw.

"YOU'RE ALIVE!" Petalnose gasped, nuzzling her sister.

"Everyone's alive," Skycloud explained. "Except..."

"Blacktail?" Petalnose asked.

Skycloud shook her head and let the tears spill out.

"Oceanpaw," she got out.

The sisters cried together, Mintkit straying towards the side of her mother, looking down sadly.

"She'll be with her parents and sister," Petalnose pointed out, though the situation didn't seem any happier.

Skycloud nodded, and together, her family gathered and stayed by each other, mourning, until the early hours of morning.

Chapter 14

Life had been all right after the battle, though it was nothing compared to life before.

Blacktail spent more time with Skycloud. At first, she thought this was only an act of kindness, but she could hear them fighting at night, screaming at each other.

Petalnose had begun to like an apprentice named Longpaw, and Mintkit had been playing with a young kittypet who joined the clan shortly after meeting her. Apparently, he was the son of Icestar's sister.

Smokepaw and Lilypaw had been fighting often, too. Now, Smokepaw seemed to stray by Wavepaw most of the time, avoiding Lilypaw altogether.

Mintkit was four moons old today, and Skycloud padded over to the nursery to see her sister and niece.

"Good morning," Skycloud called, smiling as she entered the familiar nursery.

Petalnose and Mintkit smiled and waved to her. Skycloud turned her head, watching as Longpaw padded in behind her.

"Hello, Petalnose!" the golden tom greeted her.

Petalnose smiled back, and it was obvious the two loved each other. Skycloud was glad to see Petalnose had begun to move on from Rockclaw and was interested in a cat of her own clan.

"Want to go on a walk?" Longpaw asked.

Petalnose nodded, then turned towards Skycloud.

"Can you watch Mintkit?" she asked.

"Of course," Skycloud agreed. "You need exercise, Petalnose. You're always locked away in here."

Petalnose smiled and exited the den, leaving Skycloud to lay down in her sister's nest.

"How are you, Mintkit?" Skycloud asked.

"Good now that you're here!" she exclaimed, bouncing up and down.

"Do you like Longpaw?" Skycloud blurted out before she had time to think. It was an odd question, but if Mintkit could acknowledge Longpaw as a father, maybe the family would be normal.

Mintkit nodded. "He's very nice. Mommy likes him."

"Want to play mossball?" Skycloud suggested.

The two tossed the ball back and forth for awhile until Skycloud pricked her ears to hear rushing footsteps and cries. Skycloud glanced out the den, watching as Longpaw and Petalnose ran into camp, dried blood coating their pelts.

"Petalnose, what happened?!" Skycloud exclaimd, rushing over to inspect her sister's wounds.

Before the white she-cat could speak, Longpaw blurted out, "Moonstar took over Petalnose's body. Petalnose broke free of her curse, but I don't know how long it will be until Moonstar returns."

Icestar rushed towards the cats, her eyes widened in fear.

"So it's true then? Moonstar isn't gone?"

Petalnose turned towards Icestar and nodded. "She may have died, but she still possesses great power."

Icestar quickly nodded, as if she were going over thoughts in her head.

"I'll tell the clan of this later," she announced. "Thank goodness

you're all right, Petalnose."

Skycloud was confused as to why she did not care about the safety of Longpaw, but she shrugged, escorting the two to the medicine cat den to be tended to.

The next morning, Skycloud awoke to hear Petalnose's urgent voice.

"Please, Icestar, you *have* to let Longpaw become a warrior earlier. Please. I don't want the clan to think bad of me," she urged.

Skycloud poked her head out of the den to see the two white she-cats talking. Icestar gazed into Petalnose's green and blue eyes.

"I suppose," she sighed. "I know how honest you are, Petalnose."

"Thank you!" Petalnose exclaimed.

As soon as Icestar had left, Skycloud quickly padded over to her sister.

"What's going on?" Skycloud asked. "I heard you two talking."

"Well, last night I wasn't feeling well, so I went over to Nightwhisker's den. I found out that I'm expecting Longpaw's kits. I asked Icestar to make him a warrior early. I-I'm going to find him now. We'll be mates, Skycloud! Everything will be great!" she exclaimed.

Skycloud smiled, glad to see her sister happy.

"Good for you," she told her sister.

But as she turned away, Skycloud frowned. It seemed everyone had a better love life than her. She had loved Blacktail for moons, yet he barely glanced her way.

Chapter 15

As time moved forward and Petalnose's stomach grew, Skycloud would spend her days with Blacktail, listening as he told secrets of how he believed Thorndapple was hiding secrets from him. He told her the other day of how he had met a tom from BloodClan who had claimed to be Thorndapple's mate before Blacktail.

Skycloud would watch Blacktail quickly turn away from his mate now, and she assumed their relationship was coming to an end.

But today, it was a happy occasion. Icestar stood up at the top of the large gray rock, yowling, "Today, Mintkit is six moons old, which means she is ready to become an apprentice. From this day forward, until you receive your warrior name, you shall be called Mintpaw."

"MINTPAW! MINTPAW!" the clan cried.

"Blackheart," Icestar said.

Skycloud stood to the side, frozen as a large black tom with a single scar down his eye padded forward. He did not seem like the kind of tom to teach the kind Mintpaw.

"That's him," Blacktail growled.

A former BloodClan tom teaching her niece? Skycloud did not approve of Icestar's choice at all.

"You are strong and fierce, but you also show kindness to others. Teach this onto Mintpaw," Icestar told him.

"I shall," Blackheart growled.

Skycloud watched as Mintpaw awkwardly ran down the rock to touch noses with her new mentor.

"Poor Mintpaw," Skycloud sighed.

As the ceremony came to a close and cats began to clear out, a cry came from Petalnose, who sat near the nursery.

"MY KITS ARE COMING!" she shrieked, quickly dragging herself into the nursery.

Skycloud quickly padded into the nursery, followed by Longtail, Mintpaw, and Cloudfur. Longtail, however, was the only one let inside the nursery to witness the birth.

Skycloud waited outside nervously, Mintpaw pacing by her side. Cloudfur sat, completely calm, as if he had faith everything would go well.

It wasn't too long until the first kit was born. As Skycloud edged closer, she could make out a large ginger tom. Several minutes passed until the next was born.

The second kit was a white tom, who looked similar to his mother.

And then, the last two were born almost at the same time. One was a gray tabby she-cat, the other a gray and white she-cat who looked related to both Rosefur and Mintpaw.

As the crowds cleared and the cats were let in, Skycloud could hear Longtail's cheerful voice.

"They're beautiful kits!" Longtail exclaimed.

"These are your new siblings, Mintpaw," Petalnose said, allowing Mintpaw to greet her new siblings.

"What will you call them?" Cloudfur asked.

"The white tom will be Cottonkit, the gray and white she-cat, Ivykit. Longtail, you name the last two."

Longtail studied the two kits that had not been named. Finally, he spoke.

"The ginger tom will be Blazekit, and the gray tabby she-cat will be Riverkit."

Skycloud smiled then left the den with Blacktail to head on patrol.

"Congratulations on your sister's kits," he told her.

Skycloud grinned. "Thanks."

"I remember when Lilypaw was born," he sighed, looking into the air as if he could see the exact moment of her birth.

"So do I," Skycloud muttered.

"Those were the good times when Thorndapple didn't keep secrets from me," Blacktail growled.

"Maybe she isn't," Skycloud suggested.

"Don't be a mouse-brain, Skycloud. I *know* she is. We barely even speak anymore," Blacktail explained.

Skycluod sighed. "Maybe it just wasn't mean to be. Maybe you were supposed to fall in love with another cat." She knew it was cruel, setting Blacktail up like this, but they were so close to becoming mates...

The two continued onto a normal conversation about hunting until they arrived back to camp. Petalnose's wailing could be heard from the inside of the camp.

Skycloud's first instinct was that a kit had died, but upon arriving into the nursery, she found all four kits staring at their mother.

"Petalnose, what's the matter?" Skycloud demanded.

"It's Ivykit! She's mute!" Petalnose wailed.

All the other kits mewed and gazed at each other, but Ivykit stood silent, her green eyes fixed on her mother;s.

"It's all right, Petalnose. She's a beautiful kit, and she'll have a wonderful life."

"She'll never be a warrior!" Petalnose sobbed.

Skycloud giggled.

"Yes, she will," she explained. "And she'll have a mate and kits too someday. She understands us, don't you, Ivykit."

Surprisingly, the white and gray she-cat bobbed her head up and down.

Petalnose stopped crying and began to smile, beginning to lick Ivykit affectionately.

That she-cat will have a great life, Skycloud thought to herself.

Chapter 16

"We need to go!" came a frantic call from Thorndapple. She called to Longtail and his siblings, her mother, Stream, and Lilypaw. Quickly, they began to rush out of camp.

"Where are you going?!" Petalnose called to her mate in tears.

Longtail did not reply, but only nuzzled her affectionately before turning away to leave again.

"I'll be back soon," he promised.

"THORNDAPPLE!" came Blacktail's loud hiss. "WHERE ARE YOU GOING?!"

"I can't tell you," Thorndapple replied.

"You can't tell me anything anymore. If you won't tell me, I'm not your mate anymore.

Thorndapple sighed and padded off, leaving Blacktail behind.

"I can't believe she did that," Blacktail sighed, turning towards Skycloud.

Skycluod gently set her tail on his shoulder. "I'm sorry. It must be hard for you."

"No, I'm just disappointed that I fell for such a stupid she-cat," he growled.

"Blacktail," Skycloud gulped. "I know this is sudden, but I-I sort of love you, Blacktail, and I've wanted to be mates for awhile."

Blacktail's eyes widened. "Really? I was thinking the same?"

Skycloud's heart beat rapidly against her chest. Was this really happening? Was her dream really coming true?

"So, would you be my mate, Skycloud?"

Skycloud nodded and nuzzled Blacktail. He'd be her mate now, forever and ever.

The two lovers went off, leaving Petalnose wailing with her kits, just like how Rockclaw had left her.

"Petalnose is missing!" Icestar gasped.

Skycloud quickly stood up from where she was sitting with Blacktail. She couldn't believe it! Her sister had gone to BloodClan--that had to be it. She could be killed!

"Blacktail, come with me. We'll organize a patrol!" Icestar called.

Skycloud watched her mate leave, hoping he would be safe, but for right now, she was only focused on Petalnose.

Time passed, and Skycloud paced the camp, watching over Petalnose's four worried kits.

Suddenly, a bloody Thorndapple ran into camp, carrying Petalnose on her back. She, too, was coated in blood--her own.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!" Skycloud gasped. "LET HER GO!"

Thorndapple slammed Petalnose into a tree, screaming, "Now she'll die for sure!"

"NO!" Skycloud hissed, launching at Thorndapple. She was surprised to be pulled back by Blacktail, who hissed at his ex-mate. Something wasn't right about Thorndapple though. The way her eyes moved back and forth, the way she seemed unstable.

Skycloud quickly ran over to her bloody sister, calling for help.

"Petalnose," she began, tears in her eyes.

"Longtail. Where is he?" she asked weakly.

"He's not here," Skycloud groaned.

"Skycloud, take care of them. Take care of my kits. I don't want to leave them. Tell Longtail I love him," she begged.

"But you'll be all right, Petalnose, won't you? NIGHTWHISKER!" Skycloud shouted.

Her sister's eyes had closed now, and she watched as the rise and fall of her chest stopped.

"NO!" Skycloud screeched, sobbing into her sister's body. Suddenly, Longtail appeared near her side.

"PETALNOSE!" he shouted. The kits quickly followed, bursting into tears as they stared at their dead mother.

After awhile of mourning, the body was buried, and vigil began.

"Come kits," Skycloud said. "I'll be taking care of you now."

As Skycloud sat near Longtail in the dark, Blazekit, Riverkit, Cottonkit, and Ivykit curled next to her. Even Mintpaw curled up by her side, sobbing quietly.

The kits cried, but Skycloud silenced them.

"She'll always be in StarClan. She's never far away," Skycloud told them softly.

The five kits yawned, beginning to close their eyes. Skycloud looked up into the sky, hoping one fo the stars she could see was Petalnose.

From the distance, she could see Cloudfur and Smokepaw curled up next to each other, mourning over their dead sister. Even Icestar sat, watching the sky.

"I don't know how you do this, Skycloud," a voice came.

Skycloud jumped, then turned, noticing Blacktail.

"Do what?"

"You've had so many family members die. One of your closest ones

died today, and now you're raising her four new kits and Mintpaw. You're very brave."

"Thank you," said Skycloud. Blacktail laid down next to her, and she rested her head next to his.

A couple of weeks had passed since Petalnose's death. It seemed Blacktail, the kits, and Cloudfur were the only ones who kept her sane since the death.

But today, Skycloud and Blacktail were going off on a walk to somehow get her sister off her mind, though Skycloud had a message of much importance for him.

She was expecting his kits.

She knew she'd have to raise Petalnose's kits as well, but she had some wild thought she could manage more than five kits.

Blacktail smiled at Skycloud, nuzzling her. Skycloud smiled back, about to hope her mouth to speak. A sudden sound came from the bushes, and a badger lurked out and growled at the,.

Skycloud gasped and took a step back, her paws slipping over the side of a hill that fell into the river. She drove her claws into the side.

"Blacktail, help!" she cried.

The tom ran over, but the badger swiped at him, causing him to lose his footing and fall into the river below.

"BLACKTAIL!" she yowled, sighing in relief to find the tom already crawling onto land, safe.

Skycloud let go, ice water piercing her side. She quickly crawled her way out of the river, collapsing next to Blacktail, exhausted.

"Are you all right?" he asked. Skycloud nodded.

A sudden yowl and huge crash could be hear overhead, near the waterfall.

"What was that?" Blacktail asked.

Skycloud shrugged, padding with Blacktail through the shallow river towards the edge of the river. A body floated on the edge, immediately making Skycloud sick. It was Thorndapple's.

"Thorndapple?" Blacktail asked.

The she-cat weakly lifted her head. "Blacktail, it's you! I was trying to find you!"

"Why?"

"I had to explain about everything that's been happening," she coughed. "And then, I saw you with Skycloud, and I saw you fall. I thought you were dead, and I didn't want to live life without you. I thought I would die with you. I still love you."

"Y-You do?" he asked.

Thorndapple nodded, and suddenly, Skycloud felt like a jerk.

"Why would you jump off like that?" Blacktail asked quietly.

"I-I don't know. I wasn't satisfied with my life anymore. I was willing to give it up so easily," she cried. Skycloud was able to notice the pain in her voice.

"I will die, Blacktail. My legs are broken. It's no use. I love you."

"I love you, too," Blacktail told her. Skycloud could feel her heart breaking from the sadness. It was over. He'd never move on, she'd be stuck raising kits with no father.

"No!" came a tiny voice. Lilypaw.

"I'm sorry, Thorndapple," Skycloud said to the dying cat. "We became mates after you left and--"

"It's all right," the brown tabby she-cat sighed, becoming motionless.

Lilypaw quickly ran down to her mother as she took her last breath.

"Why? Why did she die? Why did you let this happen, Daddy?!" Lilypaw growled. "I hate you! I HATE YOU!"

Skycloud watched Blacktail fall apart. He was hurt, too hurt.

"I'm sorry, Skycloud," he muttered, running off.

Where was he going anyway? Was he really going to leave Skycloud alone with his dead mate and angry daughter?

She could catch a glimpse of him near the top of the hill. No. No, she knew what he was doing.

"NO! BLACKTAIL, NO!" she shouted. He was insane, that's what he was. Why had she never realized this before?

It was too late. HIs body fell down the waterfall swiftly, and Skycloud turned away, pain spreading throughout her entire body.

The body collapsed near Thorndapple's, and Skycloud imemdiately ran to his side.

"Blacktail," she began, but his eyes weren't fixated on her. They never were.

"Daddy, I didn't want you to do that," Lilypaw cried.

The tom died right in front of her.

Lilypaw began to sob, but Skycloud remained quiet. She understood everything now. As she looked at the dead bodies of the two mates, she knew that they were always meant for each other, that she'd only gotten in the way of that. They had died together, and they would live together in StarClan.

"Our kits," she whispered.

"YOU! YOU CAUSED THIS!" Lilypaw shrieked, racing off into the woods and leaving Skycloud alone. This time, Skycloud broke, but no one was there to watch her.

Chapter 17

Skycloud had not been doing well. As if the death of her sister hadn't been enough, she was facing the hard death of Blacktail as well. How could she raise kits with no father?

Her mind drifted to Petalnose, whose mate had left her while she was pregnant. Mintpaw had been raised without a father, and her other litter would be growing up without a mother. At least the kits would still be cared for.

Icestar had not chosen a deputy after Blacktail, even though it contradicted clan rules. Icestar, who had grown old and tired, claimed she did not know of a single cat who would fit the job and was waiting for StarClan to send an answer.

As this went on, it was the job of Skycloud, Longtail, and Mintpaw to look over Petalnose's four kits. They had grown some, their claws becoming sharper, their eyes becoming more pointed, but they still dealt emotionally with the loss of their mother.

Ivykit, the mute she-cat, often worried Skycloud. How could a kit that could not talk be expected to deal with that emotion? Still though, she found friendship with a young apprentice named Stonepaw, which gave Skycloud hope.

As for her brother, Smokepaw, Skycloud was aware he'd be a warrior soon. He and Lilypaw had seemed to make up after their long fight, though Wavepaw acted as if she had not noticed.

Skycloud opened her eyes as she felt a tug on one of her gray ears. She looked down, noticing little Cottonkit tugging at them.

"Good morning," she greeted him.

The other kits were already awake, waiting for Skycloud to awake.

"Morning, Mommy," Blazekit mewed.

Skycloud froze in her tracks and shook her head. "No, Blazekit. I am not your mother. Petalnose is your mother. Longtail is your father. I am your aunt," she scolded.

"But you act like a mother to us," Riverkit protested. Ivykit nodded beside her.

"I am not your mother, and you're not allowed to call me that either. Petalnose is and always will be your mother. Now why don't you run along and play with your sister, Mintpaw," she suggested.

"But she's busy!" Cottonkit complained.

Longtail padded into the den, arguing coming to a cease.

"DADDY!" the kits cried, running to their father. He talked to them for a few minutes, laughing and smiling. Then, as he encouraged them to play, he padded over to Skycloud.

"How are they?" he asked.

"Can I talk to you for a second?" Skycloud whispered, eyeing the kits who played in the den.

Longtail nodded, and Skycloud led him outside into the camp.

"Longtail, my kits will arrive in a few moons," Skycloud began. "I won't be able to take care of them anymore. Today, they called me their mother. I don't want them to address me as that, Longtail. Petalnose is their mother. Will you please remind them of that? I-I don't want to replace her," she sighed.

Longtail dipped his head. "Don't fret. I'll make sure they know that. And I'll make sure they're taken care of when your kits are born."

"Thank you," she purred, padding back into the nursery. Though she technically did not have to be in the nursery for a few moons, Icestar had advised her to stay there to raise Petalnose's kits as well as her own. Basically, she'd be condemned to the nursery for many moons.

Skycloud stayed with the kits for awhile, watching as they played.

Suddenly, footsteps came quickly, and Mintpaw rushed into the den.

"Did you hear?! Did you hear?!" she gasped.

"What?" Skycloud asked, alarmed.

"A new tom has just arrived! He's going to join our clan! His name is Mossclaw! Isn't it exciting?!"

Skycloud looked at the den to get a glimpse of the tom. He was a pure white tom with a faint tracing of black on his ears and tip of tail. He was quite handsome, she had to admit, but she wasn't looking for another mate. He was tall and looked strong, perfect for SnowClan. Maybe he'd be the new deputy.

"Mintpaw!" Blackheart, her mentor, yowled. Blackheart, a grumpy old tom, had seemed to grow happier after receiving his apprentice. Skycloud always assumed Mintpaw would become mates with Foxpaw, but now, she believed she was wrong. Foxpaw liked Petalpaw, a former MoonClan she-cat, while Mintpaw seemed to grow towards Blackheart.

"Coming!" Mintpaw yowled, nearly bumping into Mossclaw on her way out.

Throughout the rest of the morning, Skycloud watched as Icestar led Mossclaw around the camp, giving him a visual tour. When she stopped at the nursery, Skycloud quickly scurried back to her nest, wrapping her tail around Petalnose's sleeping kits.

"And this is Skycloud," Icestar explained, pointing to her. "Her sister died recently, so she's been raising her kits. Skycloud is expecting kits of her own."

"Hi. Welcome to SnowClan," she said, introducing herself. She held back a glare she wanted to make towards Icestar for telling him her entire life story.

"Hi," Mossclaw replied, smiling. "That's very kind of you to raise your sister's kits like that."

Skycloud nodded, watching as Mossclaw and Icestar left. Skycloud sat back down and rested her head on her paws, slowly drifting off to sleep.

Chapter 18

"ALL CATS OLD ENOUGH TO CATCH THEIR OWN PREY, JOIN BENEATH THE ROCK FOR A CLAN MEETING!" Icestar yowled throughout the camp.

Skycloud peeked her head out of the nursery, the kits doing the same. Today, her own brother, Smokepaw, would become a warrior with Wavepaw and Lilypaw. She had seen Lilypaw and Smokepaw conversing more, making her smile. it was good to see them being friendly again.

The three apprentices stood proudly, and Skycloud felt guilt as she saw Lilypaw, standing bravely. She had no parents to gaze down at her grin. No, it was just her standing up there with no family to smile at. At least Smokepaw would have his two older siblings.

"I call upon my warrior ancestors to look upon these three apprentices. They have trained hard to follow your noble code, and I grant them to you as warriors in return. Wavepaw, you are fierce and loyal. From this day forward, you shall be known as Wavestorm!"

The gray she-cat grinned at the crowd, cats smiling. Skycloud rolled her eyes, knowing the she-cat was a cruel brat who had secretly worked for MoonClan. Smokepaw had told Skycloud this one night, though apparently he claimed she had stopped working for them in an act of love for Smokepaw and her clan.

"Lilypaw," Icestar continued, turning to face the golden-brown she-cat. "You are brave and kind. From this day forward, you shall be known as Lilywhisker."

The she-cat's face lit up, and Skycloud speculated her parents were watching from StarClan, proud of their only kit.

"And Smokepaw," Icestar said, turning to face Skycloud's brother. "You are brave and loyal--the perfect combination for a good leader.

Smokepaw, from this day forward, you shall be known as Smokefur..."

Before the cats could cheer, Icestar held up her tail to halt them.

"StarClan came to me a few nights ago," she explained to the clan. "They claimed you would be a good leader, Smokefur. I declare you the new deputy of SnowClan!"

Mews of confusion came from the camp. He had only just become a warrior. He couldn't lead a clan. Icestar silenced the clan and began to yowl, "WAVESTORM! LILYWHISKER! SMOKEFUR!"

The crowd disappeared, and Skycloud padded out of the nursery to congratulate her younger brother. As soon as she came close to him, she could hear Wavestorm bickering with him.

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU DON'T WANT TO BE MATES?!" she yowled, outraged.

"I'm sorry, Wavestorm," the spotted tom sighed. "It was never meant to be with us. Never."

"You'll regret this, you piece of fox-dung! I'm expecting *your* kits!" she shouted.

Smokefur and Skycloud gasped at the same time, and she moved farther from them, hoping they had not seen her listening to their conversation.

Skycloud growled quietly, knowing she would have Wavestorm as a denmate. This would be a nightmare. Her kits would grow up with Wavestorm's.

Smokefur apologized one last time, noticing Skycloud wandering near him. He ran off towards her, out of breath.

"Sorry!" he admitted. "Didn't see you there until now!"

"Congrats on deputyship!" Skycloud exclaimed. "I, um, heard about Wavestorm."

Smokefur nodded sadly. "I know. I feel bad that I won't raise the kits, but Lilywhisker and I have become mates. I was foolish. I should've never loved her. Well," he said, glancing up, "I better be off. Icestar wants to speak to me!"

Skycloud smiled, remember how her brother was once a weak tom who could not protect himself from the harsh mews of his mother. Now, he was deputy, and would someday lead the clan.

"Hi, again," came a call.

Skycloud jumped, noticing Mossclaw standing near her.

"Oh, Mossclaw," Skycloud murmured, surprised. "What brings you here?"

"I'm still trying to get used to my clanmates and the clan here. Want to go hunting?" he asked.

Skycloud bit her lip. She didn't want to become acquainted with the tom. She knew Petalnose's kits were old enough to stay on their own in the nursery for a little bit, but she decided against it.

"I really should be taking care of my sister's kits," she explained. "Maybe later."

Immediately, Mossclaw's face was full of disappointment. He shook his head though, smiling.

"Oh, sorry I asked. Later. That's fine. Bye!"

He scampered off quickly, and Skycloud stood for a few moments, trying to figure out what the tom was up to.

Mintpaw's giggling caused Skycloud's thoughts to come to a cease. She turned around, facing the white and gray she-cat.

"What now?" Skycloud asked, annoyed.

"Isn't it obvious?" Mintpaw asked. "Mossclaw likes you!"

"Well, I don't want a mate," Skycloud growled. "I have to raise

Petalnose's kits and Blacktail's. I don't have time for another mate. I won't let him go so easily."

Mintpaw backed up, unaware of Skycloud's strong feelings. "Sorry," she said quickly, running off.

"No, come back!" Skycloud called. But Mintpaw did not turn around to look back.

Skycloud sighed, padding off into the nursery. If the tom truly did like her, it was his loss. Skycloud couldn't have another mate, and maybe she was never meant to have one. It was impossible to foretell the destiny StarClan had laid out for her.

She sighed, laying down. Quickly, she was overrun by four kits who desperately wanted to play with her. But Skycloud only shooed them away, too depressed to play.

Chapter 19

Skycloud's stomach grew, and so did Petalnose's kits. Petalnose's four fine kits would become apprentices any day, she was sure of that.

Ivykit had not been herself lately though. Stonepaw, the apprentice she had played with, had tragically died at the claws of a fox. Icestar had been devastated as well, for she had been the young tom's mentor and had watched over him since his days in the nursery.

But Skycloud knew Icestar's time was short. There were rumors she was on her last life, and greencough had taken over her body.

Mossclaw had tried desperately for Skycloud to at least go on a walk with him, but she shook her head and declined each time.

Today, he came in like he normally did, saying hello.

"I know you're busy, but would you like to go on a walk?" he asked within a few moments of their small-talk.

Skycloud sighed, ready to decline. She knew the tom had been adamant though, and she guessed she hadn't been very kind to the new warrior.

"I guess," she agreed, padding out of the den. She left Petalnose's kits behind to play and went with the tom to go on a walk. She needed exercise, and her yet-to-be-born-kits made her exhausted.

At first, their chatter was small, stuff about prey, the clan, but Mossclaw started to bring out personal questions.

"I bet those kits have a strong father," Mossclaw told Skycloud.

"Had," she muttered. "He died awhile ago."

Mossclaw looked down sadly, though Skycloud assumed he was

silently cheering.

"What was his name?" he asked. It was an innocent question, but Skycloud felt offended.

"Blacktail," she said slowly, as if her throat was chalky. "He used to be deputy before my brother, Smokefur."

"How'd he die?" Mossclaw asked.

"You shouldn't be asking me these questions! You have no right to even know about my personal life!" she spat.

Mossclaw shrunk down, though he was a large down, and by shrinking down, he only remained at Skycloud's height.

"I'm sorry. I was only curious," he admitted.

Skycloud growled, scowling as they continued to pad by the river.

"Wow, the river has become full. It looks like the ice has almost melted," Skycloud observed.

Mossclaw nodded, pausing before he spoke. "My mother said it was the spirit of cats filling that river. Most cats die in leaf-bare, and they would go to the river. Once the ice melted in the spring, the cats would be freed from the ice and then sent to StarClan."

"That's an interesting observation. Was your mother a clan cat?"

"Sort of. She was exiled when she was a young warrior. It was by accident, of course. She was framed for killing another cat. My father believed it, so my mother took me and raised me on her own. She died when I was only seven moons. I spent my life as a rogue, then found ForestClan; that's where my mother lived. They took care of me, but I didn't feel it was the right clan for me. They had grown weak after the fire several moons before. My father also knew of my identity and constantly snapped at me, so I came here to SnowClan."

"That's nice," Skycloud grinned. "Well, I'm going for a hunt," she said, beginning to pad along the side of the river. She was getting

annoyed with the tom's stories, and she desperately wanted the walk to end.

Skycloud spotted a squirrel scurrying along the river's edge. Quickly, she ran after it, beginning to pounce. As she did so, her foot slipped over the ice of the river, and she fell back, falling through the thin ice.

The water hit her hard, and it felt as if a million needles were jabbing her.

"Help!" she called, desperately splashing her paws at the cold water. Shards of ice jabbed into her paws, and she fell back under the water, her lungs filling with water. Was this how she would die? Would she be with Blacktail?

No, I can't die, Skycloud thought, her vision becoming cloudy. She had to raise their kits. She had to raise Petalnose's kits.

But her strength was fading, and her body ached. She slowly drifted towards the bottom, closing her eyes and waiting for death. She imagined Blacktail coming towards her, pulling her towards StarClan.

Suddenly, she felt herself being lifted, towards StarClan no doubt. But immediately she felt cold air hit her, and her lungs were on fire. She opened her eyes as she collapsed onto the thin snow, coughing up water until there was nothing left to come out.

Skycloud shivered, shaking off her wet coat.

"Are you all right?" Mossclaw asked.

It was he who had saved her, not Blacktail.

"I'm fine!" she snapped, furious with the tom. She wasn't sure why. He had saved her life, after all.

"Why did you even do that?" she asked.

"To save your kits. And you, of course."

Skycloud rolled her eyes. "Leave me alone, Mossclaw," she growled, leaving the tom behind as she walked back to camp, soaked with water and guilt she felt for Mossclaw.

You hate him. So what if he saved your life? You don't need a mate. You're Skycloud. You have a family to take care of.

Still, she couldn't think that way. The tom had saved her life and risked his life by doing it. She had never thought Blacktail would leap into ice willingly to save her. After all, Blacktail had left her alone to raise his kits.

Skycloud realized she had grown towards the tom no matter how hard she tried to hate him, but she couldn't keep her guard down. Not now she couldn't. She thought about her family, wondering what Rosefur would want. She knew she was making the wrong choice to ignore the tom.

She would befriend him, for she was awfully lonely, but she wouldn't become mates. Blacktail's love had left an imprint on her that would last forever.

She padded back into camp, wet and cold. Cats stood around the center, sorrowful.

"What happened?!" Skycloud gasped.

"Icestar is dead," her brother, Cloudfur, explained. "Smokefur is our new leader."

"Smokefur!" Skycloud gasped, rushing towards her brother. His eyes were wide with fear.

"What if I'm not good enough, Skycloud? I can't lead! I barely know how!"

Skycloud nuzzled her brother, staring into his green eyes. "You will lead, Smokefur. I promise. You'll be the least leader of them all."

Smokefur smiled at his sister. "Thank you," he replied, padding off to receive his nine lives. Skycloud watched as he disappeared to where he would discover his destiny, while Skycloud stayed back,

more confused than ever.

Chapter 20

Smokestar had been doing well so far taking on his leadership duties. He had assigned Cloudfur as his deputy, and Skycloud had been proud to see her brothers taking on leadership duties. Skycloud continued taking care of Petalnose's kits, but she was aware hers would arrive shortly. Still, she knew Petalnose's apprentices would be six moons very shortly.

Skycloud had continued hanging around Mossclaw, feeling no awkwardness between them. The two had become good friends, making Skycloud happy. She knew they wouldn't become mates, but she enjoyed time with the tom though, even slipping some information about her and Blacktail. She trusted the tom and was glad to have a friend. She had been lonely since Petalnose and Blacktail's passing.

"Would you like to share a rabbit?" Mossclaw asked one day when he came to visit Skycloud in the nursery.

"I'll watch them," Wavestorm told Skycloud. Skycloud let out a small growl, not wanting the grouchy queen to look after her sister's kits, but they were nearly six moons, and they didn't need attention all the time.

Skycloud padded out of the nursery with Mossclaw, and together, they chomped on a rabbit together until it was nearly gone.

"So, those are you sister's kits?" Mossclaw asked after they had finished their meal.

Skycloud nodded. "I've raised them since they were a moon. They barely remember their own mother. Well, except for Mintfall." Mintpaw had become a warrior, becoming mates with her mentor, Blackheart. At first, Skycloud had not approved of the she-cat's choice of mate, but she knew the two loved each other.

"Your sister had two litters?" Mossclaw asked. Skycloud could sense

confusion in his voice.

"Yes, but Mintfall had a different father."

"Can you tell me more about your sister? What was her name? Not a lot of cats speak about her."

"Her name was Petalnose," Skycloud began, unsure if she should tell Mossclaw about her sister, the she-cat she barely spoke about to anyone. "She had a pelt as white as snow, and she was the most beautiful she-cat I'd ever seen. One eye was green like the needles of a pine tree, and the other was blue like the rushing river. We were best friends, and she was the best sister I could've ever hoped for. When she was an apprentice, she mated with Rockclaw, the rogue that had traveled from ForestClan, and she gave birth to Mintfall."

Mossclaw tilted his head. "I don't recall any Rockclaw."

Skycloud shrugged. "He could've been lying. He was an awful tom. He died later in battle, but by that time, he had become mates with another she-cat. I don't know if the other she-cat had kits though."

"I know Longtail is the kit's father," Mossclaw explained. "But how did Petalniose die? Or did she get exiled? Or--" He was cut off by Skycloud's yowl.

"PETALNOSE WOULD'VE NEVER BEEN EXILED!" she spat. Silence fell between them, and she looked down, ashamed.

"I'm sorry," she admitted. "I love my sister, and she wasn't exiled. "Longtail left to another clan for family business shortly after the birth of her kits. Petalnose thought he was doing the same as what Rockclaw had done to her. She went after him, and I'm not sure what happened in between, but a cat named Thorndapple murdered her. Later, Thorndapple died along with my mate, Blacktail. Anyway, Petalnose didn't even get to see Longtail before she died. Her dying wish was for me to raise the kits."

"That's the saddest story I've ever heard. You're very strong, with your mate dying shortly afterwards. I'm terrible sorry."

Skycloud sighed. "I'm not sure how I've recovered. Nearly five moons have gone by since then, and it must've been the persistence to raise her kits. Seeing those kits reminds me of Petalnose, and it brings me joy."

"You should go to them now," Mossclaw urged.

"You don't mind?"

"I'll never mind," he told her. Skycloud could sense his love remarks at times, and she tried her best to ignore them. She let out a weak smile, then padded off into the nursery.

Lilywhisker had moved into the nursery not too long ago. Wavestorm was constantly annoyed by the she-cat, now that they were denmates. They fought constantly, and once in awhile, Smokestar would come in and lecture them like a mother lecturing kits. Skycloud knew it would be a long six moons with the two.

But today, she awoke, feeling a deep pain inside her. At first, it was a dull ache, but then, it spread throughout her, and she let out a yowl of pain. Wavestorm, as much as Skycloud hated her, sensed her pain and shouted, "NIGHTWHISKER! HER KITS ARE COMING!"

Mossclaw was the first to rush into the nursery, followed by the four new apprentices--Ivypaw, Cottonpaw, Blazepaw, and Riverpaw. She could see faint images of Mintfall, Smokestar, and Cloudfur standing there too, but she was in too much pain to see clearly.

Nightwhisker rushed inside, the medicine cat apprentice, Spottedmask following behind. A stick was placed in her mouth, and Skycloud bit down as unimaginable pain flooded through her.

"The first kit is coming," Nightwhisker explained.

Suddenly, the first kit was born. A dark gray kit slid onto the moss, squirming.

"A tom!" Spottedmask exclaimed, shoving the newly born tom towards his mother.

Skycloud waited, hoping that was all, but soon, more pain spread through her, and the second kit was born. This time, a light gray tabby kit, that looked similar to her, slid onto the moss.

"A she-cat," Spottedmask announced, shoving Skycloud's daughter towards her..

"Is that all?" Skycloud gasped, pain slowly fading.

Nightwhisker nodded, and within minutes, he had left with Spottedmask to allow Skycloud and her kits to rest.

Cottonpaw slowly entered, others following behind.

"What will you call them?" the white tom asked.

Skycloud smiled, gazing down at her two beautiful kits. She barely saw Blacktail in them. To her, they looked like herself, like Petalnose, like Rosefur.

"I'll call the tom Ashkit and the she-cat Cinderkit," she decided.

"Lovely names," Cloudfur assured her. Skycloud knew he had dreamed of his mate, Dovewing, having kits one day, but so far, his dream had not come true.

Mossclaw padded up, smiling at Skycloud. "They are beautiful kits. Blacktail would be proud."

Skycloud could feel tears gather in her eyes.

"Thank you," she purred.

Shortly after the excitement died down, Skycloud rested her head on her paws, finding herself falling into a deep sleep.

When she opened her eyes, she immediately knew where she was. StarClan. Trees swayed back and forth in the light wind, and she glanced around, wondering who she would come across. Would she see Rosefur? Petalnose? Blacktail?!

Only one cat came forward. He was a black tom with bright green

eyes, and she froze.

"Blacktail!" Skycloud gasped in excitement, rushing towards him. He let out a gentle smile as she came near.

"Did you see our kits?" she asked.

Blacktail nodded, though he didn't seem too excited. "I'm sorry I left you to take care of our kits. If I had known, I would've thought twice. Please know that I was meant to be with Thiorndapple, and I'm sorry that I hurt you."

"You never hurt me. You loved me," Skycloud assured him.

"What I say next will hurt you. Skycloud," he sighed, "Since death, I've thought long and hard about us. What was our relationship? It was a mistake, Skycloud. I was blinded by Thorndapple's rejection, and when I saw some cat had feelings for me, I preyed on those feelings. It wasn't love, Skycloud. I was lonely. I needed a replacement for Thorndapple's love. It was not your destiny, nor mine, to fall in love. The one you will love and are destined to love is not me."

"But who? WHO?!" she shouted, tears blinding her eyes. How could Blacktail have been so cruel?

"I can't tell you," Blacktail explained.

"You come here, telling me our love was fake, that you were foolish, that you never loved me, and now, you won't tell me who I love?! I am hurt, and I'm ashamed that I ever fell for a cat as stupid and terrible as you! Why did I grow up caring for you?! I-I hate you!" she spat, stalking off, seeing pain in his green eyes.

Suddenly, everything faded, and she awoke, hearing Ashkit mew loudly.

"Sh," she told him, watching as he hushed and fell back to sleep. "We don't want to wake the others."

But Skycloud could not sleep. Instead, she glanced outside, admiring the night sky. Still, she couldn't let go of what Blacktail

said, his hurtful words. She never would...

Chapter 21

It had been a few moons since the birth of Ashkit and Cinderkit. Each day, Skycloud would watch her son and daughter, joy flooding through her. The two reminded her of her family when she was but a young kit. In them she saw Rosefur, Petalnose, Mousekit, Oceanpaw...all those no longer with her.

Wavestorm's kits had been born a week after Skycloud's. She had given birth to three she-cats--Snowkit, Featherkit, and Waterkit.

Snowkit was pure white with blue and green eyes. At first, all Skycloud could see in the young kit was her sister, Petalnose. But shortly after, she was proved wrong. Like Wavestorm, Snowkit was mean and bratty, even more so than Wavestorm.

Featherkit was a white she-cat with fray on her muzzle, paws, ears, and tail. She wasn't as mean as Snowkit, but she was Snowkit's henchman.

Lastly, there was Waterkit, a silver-blue she-cat. It was amazing to think she was Wavestorm's kit. She was kind and loving, sweet to all cats. But at the same time, she was very shy.

Lilywhisker's kits had been born shortly after Wavestorm's. There were two she-cats, but Skycloud swore perhaps there had been a third. In all of the confusion and swarming of their birth, Skycloud had watched a cat rush by, and she swore a kit had been in one of the SnowClan warrior's mouth.

The two she-cats--Mousekit and Dawnkit-- reminded Skycloud once again of her family. Mousekit resembled Smokestar almost completely with her white coat and black spots. Her eyes, however, were a deep blue, like her mother's. She had been named after Smokestar's dead sister, something that had made Skycloud nearly burst into tears.

Dawnkit was a beautiful gray tabby she-cat. She, like her sister,

loved to play and was very kind.

Though Wavestorm and Lilywhisker's bickering hurt Skycloud's ears, and the bickering of the half-sisters, Mintfall had recently moved into the nursery, pregnant with Blackheart's. She spared Skycloud from much of the arguing.

Skycloud would smile when she saw Ashkit playing alongside with Ivypaw, who would often visit. Perhaps Ivypaw had moved on from the tom that had died moons before.

But so much had changed in Skycloud's life. As if being a mother wasn't hard enough, she had grown to love Mossclaw. She knew she would not have another mate, but she'd got to know him even better over the past few moons. He would visit and play with the kits, and often, they'd go on walks. Once, the kits had even referred to him as their father before Skycloud corrected them and reminded them of their dead father, Blacktail, whom she still continued to despise.

Skycloud wanted to confess her love to Mossclaw desperately, but she didn't know how, and she wondered if he'd hurt her just like Blacktail had and would leave her with kits that he would most likely never watch and love.

"Look at me! I'm such a big warrior!" Ashkit yowled at his sister.

"No, I'm bigger!" Cinderkit replied.

Skycloud laughed at the two. "You're the exact same size. You'll probably always be the same size."

"Aw, but I want to be a big, tough warrior!" Ashkit complained.

"You will, but for now, you're just a kit. You'll grow," Skycloud assured him.

"But I want to grow now!" he complained.

Skycloud laughed at her son. "Don't worry. You will. Patience will be vital in your life. You're nearly three moons, and that means three less moons until you train to become a warrior."

Before Ashkit could reply, Mossclaw padded into the den, causing Skycloud to turn her attention towards him.

"Hi, Mossclaw!" Cinderkit squeaked.

"Hello, Cinderkit," he replied, greeting the light gray she-cat. "Skycloud, would you like to go for a walk?"

"Sure," Skycloud replied, leaving her kits to play in the nursery. She knew Mintfall would watch after them while she was gone.

"How are you?" Mossclaw asked as they exited the camp.

"I'm good. And you?"

He smiled. "I'm well too." He looked into the sky, and Skycloud did the same. It was nearly sunset, and pink and orange colors were spattered against the sky as the sun began to fade from their view.

"Beautiful sunset," Mossclaw observed.

Skycloud nodded.

"Well, I've seen more beautiful things," Mossclaw admitted.

Skycloud rolled her eyes, though her heart was swelling with love. "Oh, stop it!" she teased, pawing at him.

Mossclaw laughed, beginning to wrestle with Skycloud. Together, the two wrestled like kits, laughing and shouting.

As the sun fully disappeared, Skycloud yawned.

"I'm tired," she told Mossclaw.

"Then lie down here," Mossclaw told her, laying down in the grass.

Skycloud knew she should get back to her kits, but she longed for Mossclaw, and she nodded, laying down beside him. He nuzzled her affectionately, causing Skycloud to smile. For once in her life, she felt happiness and joy. She had healthy kits and a tom who loved her very much. Maybe she would become mates with him.

Her thoughts came to an end as she closed her eyes, falling asleep to Mossclaw's purrs as he licked the top of her head.

Chapter 22

Several sunrises later, Skycloud awoke to find the day to be interesting. Earlier that morning, she had noticed her stomach was a bit plumper than usual, and suddenly, she realized she was expecting Mossclaw's kits. It was exciting, but the two weren't even mates, and Skycloud had her own kits to watch after.

She supposed he would ask her on a walk, and when he did, Skycloud decided she would tell him the good news. Maybe he would be happy, and then they could become mates. But maybe...maybe he'd leave her, just like Blacktail.

"Mossclaw?" Skycloud asked, padding up to him in the middle of the day.

The white tom looked up, smiling. "Walk?" he asked.

She nodded, and they padded into the woods.

"Lovely weather," Mossclaw observed. "Especially for this time of the year."

Skycloud nodded, gazing around the forest. It was green-leaf, and a warm sun hung over the camp now.

They continued their walk, passing the cliff that she and Blacktail had parted their separate ways moons before. Normally, Skycloud didn't care, but this time was different. She was in the same situation again.

As they just passed by, a sharp yowl came from the bushes, and out came a large white tom with razor sharp teeth and sharp claws.

Mossclaw immediately stood in front of Skycloud, growling. "This is SnowClan territory!" he spat. "You can't be here!"

The tom grinned maliciously. "Protecting this one, are you?" he asked, pointing his tail towards Skycloud.

"I am Tooth. Perhaps you recognize me? I was a MoonClan warrior, but alas, our clan failed. My spirit did not. I have a longing to kill now, especially my old enemies. Move aside," he spat. "I recognize the she-cat in battle. She buried one of the kits my sister killed."

"*Your* sister killed Oceanpaw?!" Skycloud spat, suddenly outraged.

"I'm not moving," Mossclaw spat.

"Very well," Tooth said, grinning. He suddenly sprang at Skycloud, though Mossclaw knocked him aside, hissing loudly.

Tooth was stronger than Mossclaw. He had been raised a MoonClan warrior, and he picked Mossclaw up, tossing him near the cliff. Mossclaw stood up, struggling to keep balance. Suddenly, Tooth pushed him once more, and he hung from the cliff, his claws digging into the ground above.

"MOSSCLAW!" Skycloud screeched, rushing to help the tom.

Tooth held her back, a paw holding her down.

"Jump or I kill the she-cat!" he hissed.

"What will this bring you?!" Skycloud declared. "Honor? Glory? Destroying lives of cats for fun?!"

"Quiet, she-cat!" Tooth spat, gazing at Mossclaw. She could see the evil in his eyes, the wanting for Mossclaw to fall. Skycloud tried to wiggle out from under his paw, but she could not. His arm was steel.

"Fine," Mossclaw hissed, disappearing from sight.

"MOSSCLAW!" Skycloud screeched again, tears forming in her eyes. Tooth laughed, though as he came nearer to the edge, most likely to throw Skycloud over, he found Mossclaw, hanging from a branch farther below.

"Trying to trick me, are you?!" Tooth spat. He suddenly placed his whole body on Skycloud, unsheathing his claws and trickling one along her throat.

Skycloud looked at Mossclaw, fear in her eyes as the tom raised his claw. She shut her eyes, imagining the end. At least she'd be with Mossclaw and her family. Mintfall could raise the kits. She knew Mintfall would. But her unborn kits...What about them?

"I'm sorry, Skycloud," Mossclaw said at last, letting go of the branch. She heard a deep splash, and Skycloud gasped in surprise.

With fury and rage, she pushed Tooth off her her, hissing.

"YOU MONSTER!" she hissed, but Tooth knew what he was doing. He grabbed Skycloud, tossing her over the edge in attempt to kill her.

Skycloud yowled, plunging into the stream that flowed below. This time, she hit the water harder than before, and she lay injured as the water pushed her along. She was let off in shallow water, exhausted.

Suddenly, she noticed a large white object near the water. Mossclaw! He was still alive.

"Mossclaw," Skycloud whispered.

He looked up, about to speak. Suddenly, he gasped as Tooth ran down the cliff. His claws were unsheathed, his eyes were wild, and Skycloud knew he meant to kill them.

"I love you, Mossclaw!" she shouted. "Please, know that!" she yowled as Tooth grasped Skycloud by the scruff and began to drag her away. She assumed he was going to kill her, but instead, Tooth let her off on the grass. Skycloud coughed up water as Mossclaw shouted, "I love you too! I'll come back for you, I promise!" he shouted.

Skycloud suddenly gasped as Tooth rushed into the water and leapt onto Mossclaw's injured body, beginning to attack him.

"No," Skycloud whispered, shutting her eyes as the river water turned a deep red. It was worse than what had happened to Blacktail. Blacktail's death was at his own will, but Mossclaw had so much longer to live. He had kits to look after.

Suddenly, Mossclaw's yowls fell short, and he let out a horrible screech before everything fell silent and Skycloud could only hear the river flowing.

With much victory, Tooth, with his bloodstained paws, left the now dead Mossclaw in the river.

"NO!" Skycloud yowled, rushing towards her dead lover. But Tooth held her back, and all she could do was cry. Why had she chosen to go on a walk today?

Then, her mind swarmed with sick thoughts. What would the clan think had happened to her? What would Cinderkit and Ashkit think? Would her new unborn kits survive? Perhaps it would've been better if she just died.

Chapter 23

When Skycloud next awoke, she found herself in a small den. At first, she thought it was the nursery, and she quickly glanced around for Ashkit and Cinderkit, but was disappointed when she saw Tooth.

"You're awake," Tooth growled.

"How come you didn't kill me?" Skycloud asked.

The tom did not reply, but instead, looked away.

"ANSWER ME!" Skycloud hissed. "I have every right to know! You killed the only one I loved!" When Tooth did not reply, she tried to stand up, but she only felt herself falling back down to the floor.

"I don't know!" he growled.

Skycloud growled, then noticed Tooth was fixing herbs together. Skycloud glanced at her body, realizing some of her wounds had healed.

"Are you healing my wounds?" she asked.

"I-I felt bad I killed him," Tooth admitted. "I didn't think you were actually..."

"Actually what?" Skycloud snapped.

"Mates. I thought you were, well--I've always wanted to feel that same rage as Moonstar. She was fearless, invincible. I thought that killing a cat would make me feel powerful, like I was a MoonClan cat again, but I didn't feel like Moonstar at all. I felt like a monster.

Skycloud yowled at the tom, "Moonstar had no soul! Neither do you!"

Tooth apologetically laid his tail on her shoulder. "I'm sorry," he

said, and Skycloud almost believed him.

"Don't apologize to me! If you were truly sorry, you wouldn't be keeping me prisoner!" she spat.

Tooth sighed, and sat down while Skycloud sat in the den, looking up at the stars, hoping Mossclaw could see her now.

Two moons had passed since Tooth had taken her prisoner. The SnowClan patrols had never found her, and after finding Mossclaw's body, she assumed they thought Skycloud had died as well.

Skycloud's stomach had grown, but Tooth, caught up in his own world, did not notice. Her wounds were healed now, but he would not let her leave, and Skycloud was still unsure why. Maybe when her kits were born, he would finally grant her freedom.

When Skycloud awoke one morning, she felt the same dull pain she had felt when she had given birth to Ashkit and Cinderkit.

"MY KITS ARE COMING!" she cried in pain.

"What?!" Tooth exclaimed, looking terrified. "You didn't tell me you were expecting kits!"

"You were too mouse-brained to notice!" she hissed.

"I-I don't know what to do," Tooth stammered.

"Get a stick!" she yowled.

Tooth found a large stick and placed it in Skycloud's mouth. The pain came moments later, and Skycloud bit down hard on the piece of wood.

Quickly, a little white tom a light black on his ears and tip of tail was born.

"Is that all?" Skycloud asked.

Tooth felt her stomach awkwardly. "I-I think. I'm not a medicine cat."

Skycloud licked the small tom. He was quite small for his size, but he would survive. He had to. Mossclaw's family had to live on.

"What will you call him?" Tooth asked.

"Mosskit, after my mate, Mossclaw, whom you killed," she said, glaring at Tooth. The last part didn't have to be added, but she wanted Tooth to feel the guilt for the rest of his life.

Tooth looked down again, but Skycloud continued staring at the small tom, whom she would not let die.

Chapter 24

"Momma, wake up," called Mosskit as he pushed against Skycloud. Skycloud slowly opened her eyes, awaking from her evening nap. Mosskit was a few days old now, and in those few days, Skycloud had grown happier.

"Hi, Mosskit," she greeted him.

She had already taught Mosskit about the warriors and about his father, Mossclaw. Mosskit had first believed Tooth was his father, to which Skycloud quickly growled and argued against it. Tooth again had turned away, ashamed.

"Here's a squirrel," Tooth said, dropping the limp squirrel at Skycloud's feet. She quickly gulped it down, wondering why Tooth had been acting so kind. Why were they even still prisoners?

"I want to play!" Mosskit exclaimed.

"After I finish my squirrel," Skycloud declared.

"But Tooth can take me out to play!" Mosskit argued, frowning.

"No, he can't," Skycloud snapped.

"Why not?"

"I'll tell you when you're older," she murmured, finishing her squirrel. As she finished, she went outside to allow Mosskit to get some exercise. Tooth stood in the corner, watching their every to make to make sure they couldn't escape.

Leaves had begun to fall in the new season, and Skycloud could only imagine what leaf-bare would be like when it had arrived. As a leaf drifted down from the sky, Mosskit gasped and pounced, catching it between his paws.

"Very good," Skycloud purred. "Keep your posture straight," she

instructed. She stepped forward, demonstrating. As a leaf slowly drifted down from a tree, she leapt and caught the leaf between her paws, lowering herself back down to the floor.

"Wow!" Mosskit exclaimed. "Could Daddy do that?"

Skycloud laughed. "I'm sure he could, Mosskit."

"I wish Daddy were here," Mosskit whimpered.

"You have no idea," Skycloud sighed. She shook the negative thoughts away though and began to play with her son, glad they were spending time together. She ignored the fact that her other two kits were probably wondering where she was.

As Skycloud chased Mosskit, they laughed, falling into a pile of leaves that had gathered on the floor.

Mosskit curled up next to his mother, and within a few moments, he fell asleep. Skycloud licked him affectionately. He reminded her so much of Mossclaw. She was glad Mosskit was here to keep her company. She knew Mossclaw would want her to raise Mosskit without being devastated by his death.

Skycloud picked up the sleeping Mosskit and brought him inside. Tooth followed behind her, keeping a close eye.

As Skycloud laid Mosskit down in his nest, Tooth spoke, "You really do love him?"

"Who?"

"Mosskit."

"Yes," Skycloud replied and then dreamily added, "He reminds me of Mossclaw."

Tooth nodded, letting out a sigh. "I'm sorry I took Mossclaw away from you. If I could go back in time, I would undo it," he said, almost painfully.

"You mean it?" Skycloud asked.

The tom nodded, his green eyes fixed on hers. She knew he was telling the truth and that Mossclaw's death was haunting him. She could tell by the way his eyes sometimes drooped, by the looks he gave Skycloud.

Suddenly, Skycloud felt an odd feeling towards the tom. It wasn't so much hate and disgust, but more of a safe feeling, similar to how she felt around Mossclaw. She couldn't have been falling in love with the tom, could she?

Tooth padded off to his nest, but Skycloud interrupted him.

"It's pretty windy," she observed. "Your fur is thin. Do you want to move your nest by ours tonight?"

"Sure," he replied, moving his nest. Skycloud settled down next to Mosskit, wrapping her paws around the tiny kit. Tooth slept by her side and quickly fell asleep, leaving Skycloud to glance at the stars. She could almost see Mossclaw looking down at her.

The next day, Skycloud awoke to find Mosskit still asleep. Tooth had just returned with a rabbit, a white tom following behind him.

"Who's this?" Skycloud asked.

The tom was much younger than Tooth, though he looked like he could be a warrior.

"This is my son, Fang," Tooth said, introducing his son to Skycloud.

"You have kits and a mate?" Skycloud asked.

"It's a long story," Tooth admitted. "I mean, I was mates with Moonstar's daughter, Leopardtail, but I fell in love with another cat shortly before her kits were born. Leopardtail had two toms--Fang and Cloud. Cloud went off to FoxClan, and Leopardtail died in battle, so I had to take care of Fang. The cat I had fallen in love with felt guilty for taking me away from my previous mate and kits, so she left me. It's just me now."

Fang nodded in agreement, tilting his head as he noticed Mosskit.

"Is that your kit, Tooth?"

"No," Skycloud and Tooth both said in unison.

"Oh, I thought for a second you two were mates and that kit was--"

He was cut off by Tooth.

"No, Fang. Her mate died and she gave birth to his kit while she was my prisoner," Tooth explained.

"Can I play with him?" Fang asked.

Skycloud hesitated for a moment, unsure if the tom should be trusted. She watched as he bounced around, and she realized he still acted like a kit.

"Sure," she agreed.

Mosskit opened his eyes, immediately gasping as he saw Fang.

"Who are you?!"

"This is Tooth's son, Fang. He wants to play with you," Skycloud told her son.

"What do you want to play?" Mosskit asked the tom. He got up from his nest and followed Fang outside, chatting eagerly.

The two began to play, and Skycloud stood near Tooth at the opening of the den, watching them.

"He's still a kit," Tooth explained. "Fang may be at the warrior age, but he still tosses a moss ball back and forth."

"Let him act that way. Being a kit is fun. There's nothing you need to worry about."

"Yeah," Tooth agreed.

Skycloud smiled, watching as her son bounced around with Fang as if he were a nursery mate.

Chapter 25

A few days had passed since Fang had arrived. The tom had been playing well with Mosskit, and Skycloud would smile as Mosskit eagerly chatted about his new friend.

As for Skycloud, she had gotten to know Tooth a little better. He didn't seem like such a bad cat after all. The past few days were the best times she had gotten along with him.

Mosskit awoke early and began to play with Fang again, leaving Tooth and Skycloud alone.

"Wow, he really likes Fang," Tooth observed as they watched the two play in a pile of leaves.

Skycloud nodded.

"It's a shame Fang is leaving soon," Tooth sighed.

"He is?"

"Well, he's old enough to roam free now. He's been wandering with my sister and her kit, but he decided to come visit for a few days. My sister's kit, Fire--he's a bit older than Fang--will be going off with Fang. I think they plan to join a clan," Tooth explained.

"It's possible," Tooth argued. "I don't know if it will work out for them though."

"Were you born in MoonClan?" Skycloud asked.

He shook his head. "No, I was born in BloodClan with my sisters--sister, I mean. When I was an apprentice, my father was going to receive his nine lives to become leader, but Moonstar made him believe life would be better in MoonClan. So our whole family joined MoonClan. We all changed names, except my mother. I used to be called Flightpaw, my sister Icepaw, and my father had just been named Whitestar."

"Wow," Skycloud gasped. "Seems like you didn't have a choice, then."

"No, I didn't. I was going to miss my clan and friends, but I was told I would gain great warrior skills, and I was told that MoonClan would receive the whole forest. I thought my father would take over MoonClan after the battle, but he was a coward and left with his mate to somewhere else."

"That's a shame," Skycloud said. "But what about your mother?"

"Moonstar killed my mother before the battle," Tooth said sorrowfully.

"I'm sorry," Skycloud replied sadly.

As the sky began to turn a dark indigo blue, and the moon began to shine, Mosskit came inside with Fang.

"Good-bye, Father," Fang told Tooth. "I'll be leaving now."

"You can't leave!" Mosskit whined. "I thought we were friends!"

"We are friends," he said softly. "But I can't stay forever."

Mosskit sighed and laid down in his nest, sulking. Fang ave one more good-bye and left.

Skycloud laid down next to Mosskit until he eventually fell asleep, but Skycloud unfortunately could not find sleep. Tooth was still up, watching from the opening of the den.

Skycloud padded towards him, concerned.

"Is everything okay?" she asked.

"No," he answered honestly. "My whole life has been me becoming the best warrior. Moonstar tried to get a rogue to kill me, Moonstar tried to kill me, and I've almost been killed multiple times. I never really wanted to dedicate my life to killing cats after MoonClan. I never even enjoyed MoonClan that much."

"Oh."

"I'm sorry once again about your mate, Skycloud."

Skycloud sighed. "We weren't mates," she admitted.

"But you were expecting kits!"

"I had a mate before Mossclaw. He died, and I didn't want another mate, but then I fell in love with Mossclaw. I was expecting his kits, and I was going to tell him when..."

"I'm so sorry," Tooth groaned. "It's all my fault."

"It was his destiny," Skycloud decided.

Skycloud suddenly felt that warmth towards Tooth again, almost the same as Mossclaw. Tooth turned towards his her, his green eys wide and filled with love. Skycloud laid against the tom, grinning as he nuzzled her affectionately. She was falling in love with the tom. Perhaps this is what Mossclaw had wanted.

I love you, Tooth, forever and forever, she thought to herself as he licked her ear.

Suddenly, the affection was broken by a yowl.

"MOMMA, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!" Mosskit hissed.

"Mosskit," Skycloud began, but the tom had already raced out of the den into the woods.

"COME BACK!" Skycloud shouted, racing after the tom and into the woods. She found him by a tree in tears.

"Sh, it's alright," she coaxed.

"You told me he was evil, Momma. I thought you loved Daddy."

"I do love Daddy, and you know that Mossclaw--Mosskit, I mean. Sometimes, we have to move on though. Just because Fang left doesn't mean you'll never make a friend again, right?"

Mosskit nodded.

"It's the same love, Mosskit."

"I guess I understand now," he sniffed. "You still love Daddy, right?"

"Of course I do," she purred. She picked up the tom by the scruff and padded back inside the den.

She sat Mosskit down and he quickly fell asleep. Tooth sighed moments later.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"I've known for awhile what the right choice is. Skycloud, you're free to return back to your clan."

"You mean it?!" Skycloud gasped, excitement flooding through her.

Tooth nodded slowly, though he seemed sad about it.

She pranced around the den like a young kit, shouting, "Thank you! Thank you! We'll leave tomorrow! Thank you!"

Tooth seemed hurt, but Skycloud was so excited that she didn't notice. She was going home. That was what mattered.

Chapter 26

As morning light of a clear day shined through the den, Skycloud woke Mosskit up.

He opened his eyes lazily, staring at his mother in confusion. "What? What happened?"

"We're going home, Mosskit!" she exclaimed.

"Home?" he asked.

"To SnowClan! We're returning to SnowClan! Oh, you'll get to meet all the cats there, and you'll get to make new friends! It'll be fun!"

"Yay!" Mosskit shrieked, standing up and shaking off his white pelt.

Tooth sighed, and looked over at Skycloud. "Good-bye. Once again, I'm sorry."

"That's all right," Skycloud said quietly. "Come on, Mosskit," she urged, picking up the tom by the scruff. She looked back at the sad Tooth one last time before rushing off into the woods.

They traveled for awhile, not crossing the border until mid-day. When she crossed the familiar border, she felt the same joy she had felt that morning with Mossclaw. This joy only lasted for a second, however, because she realized that she had no one to go back to. Sure, Ashkit and Cinderkit were there, along with Skycloud's brothers, but there was no Mossclaw, no Petalnose, no anyone, really.

She edged through the territory until she came to the camp. The second she walked in, gasps came from the cats.

"SKYCLOUD!" Cloudfur yowled, running towards his sister. "Where have you been?"

Cats crowded her, asking questions. Before she answered, she set

Mosskit down in the nuresry where Ashkit and Cinderkit began to question too. Skycloud motioned them outside until every cat had surrounded her, waiting for an explanation.

"So?" Smokestar asked. "We found Mossclaw's body in the river, and we assumed you had drowned too."

"Mossclaw didn't drown," Skycloud confessed. "Another cat killed him."

"Who?" Cluodfur asked.

Skycloud sighed, wondering if she should tell them. "His name was Tooth. He held me prisoner for many moons. I gave birth to Mosskit two moons after I was captured. Mosskit is Mossclaw's kits."

From the distance, she could see hurt shining in Cinderkit and Ashkit's eyes.

"I love all my kits equally," she whispered to them, licking their heads. They had grown, and she assumed they'd be apprentices very soon.

Skycloud was about to continue her story of Tooth's kindness, but suddenly, Smokestar spoke, "We must find this cat!"

"Wait, you didn't ket me--"

"Cloudfur, send a patrol," Smokestar instructed.

Cloudfur did as he was told, and before Skycloud could argue against it, the cats were off. Now they would find Tooth. They wouldn't kill him, but they would most likely take him as prisoner of make him leave the forest.

Skycloud padded inside the nursery, rushing towards Mosskit. They had to stop this. Who knew what they would do to Tooth?

Cinderkit and Ashkit were silent, glaring at Mosskit and Skycloud. They were not taking their mother's return with a young kit well. Suddenly, everything made sense to Skycloud.

Her destiny was not to return to SnowClan. No one was left there. Her brothers had mates and good lives, her kits would be raised well. SnowClan held too many depressing memories. No, she was meant to be with Tooth and Mosskit. They were to be rogues.

"Come on, Mosskit," Skycloud snapped.

"Where are we going?" Mosskit asked.

"Home," she replied.

Chapter 27

"Home? But SnowClan is home!" Mosskit protested.

"I was wrong," Skycloud admitted. "Come on! We have to go before it's too late."

She quickly grabbed Mosskit and rushed into the woods, no cat even noticing her absence.

She wasn't exactly sure where the den was, but she would find it. As she ran, clouds began to dot the blue sky, and Skycloud looked up, worried it would rain soon.

She ran for many miles, sometimes in circles, sometimes straight, searching for the den. Suddenly, she found the familiar den, and she breathed in relief.

"Tooth!" she called, rushing into the den. But inside were only empty nests and a half-eaten rabbit that he probably had not finished when the SnowClan cats came.

She rushed out of the den, a slight drizzle coming down.

"TOOTH!" she yowled at the top of her lungs.

Mosskit yowled for Tooth as well, and together, they went through the forest, calling for the tom.

"Skycloud?" a weak response came minutes later.

"Tooth!" Skycloud yelled.

She then saw him by a tree. As she came closer, she realized he'd been tied to this tree in thorns and brambles.

"What did they do to you?!" she gasped in surprise.

"They tied me up here. I think they were hoping I would die soon

enough," he replied.

Skycloud could already notice faint scratches on his pelt. His white pelt had been spotted with bits of dried blood. She realized that if he struggled, he would be pierced.

"I'll get you out," she said, slicing thorns with her claws. Although some thorns pierced her pelt, it was worth it to save Tooth.

When Tooth finally managed to crawl out, thorns and brambles were stuck to his fur.

"I'm so sorry I left you!" Skycloud exclaimed, helping him peel off the brambles. "I didn't realize what I had done until I returned to SnowClan."

"Then I suppose you'll be returning," Tooth said.

"No," Skycloud replied. "This is my home. Right here with you and Mosskit."

Mosskit smiled, and Skycloud watched as Tooth's face lifted into a warm grin.

When the last bramble had come off, Tooth suggested, "Let's get to my den."

They entered the den, using cobwebs to soak up Tooth's blood.

"Thanks," Tooth told her. "Why did you come back for me anyway? I ruined your life."

"Because I love you. I didn't realize it until now."

Tooth smiled and nuzzled Skycloud, whispering quietly, "I love you too." Mosskit lay asleep in his nest, resting.

"What about your other kits?" Tooth asked.

"They hate me, and they remind me of my old mate, Blacktail, who hated me too. They'll be raised fine in SnowClan."

As it got dark, Skycloud rested next to the tom, Mosskit laying on her other side. The peacefulness did not last for long as thunder cracked and lightning lit up the sky.

Mosskit shivered against his mother, whispering, "I don't like storms."

"It's all right," Skycloud coaxed, wrapping her tail around the small tom.

Suddenly, more lightning came, and a strong odor of smoke flooded through the forest.

"Fire!" Tooth yowled.

Skycloud gasped. Lightning had struck a tree nearby and had caught fire, now causing the fire to spread through the forest. The three quickly evacuated, beginning to run away from the flames.

Skycloud grabbed Mosskit and ran. Suddenly, a large branch fell, crushing Skycloud's foot beneath her.

She screeched in pain, dropping Mosskit. Tooth gasped, turning around.

"Skycloud!" he yowled, pulling the branch off with all his might. But Skycloud could not move, and Tooth could not hold Skycloud and Mosskit.

Mosskit stood in fear, watching as fire began to circle around them.

"Run, Mosskit!' Skycloud screeched at last, her decision made.

"What?"

"Run! Don't look back! Keep on running until you're safe! Run!"

"But, Momma..."

"No, Mosskit! Run now! Run!"

Tears slid down Mosskit's cheek. He gave one last look at his

mother and ran off into the meadow up ahead, his little legs moving quickly.

Tooth lifted Skycloud off the ground.

"We've got to get up to higher ground," he told her, climbing a tree. He held Skycloud on his back, and she clung tightly. They stood on a branch while fire encircled them below. She hoped Mosskit was safe.

Suddenly, fire began to crawl up the tree, coming after Tooth. The branch he was on gave a crack, and the Tooth quickly glanced at Skycloud, fear in his eyes as it fell.

"Tooth!" Skycloud screeched. With only one good leg, she carefully slid down the tree. Fire licked her pelt, causing some of her fur to burn off.

She reached the ground, only to find the crumbled and dead body of the tom.

"Tooth!" she screeched, beginning to cry. "I love you," she whispered, pressing her nose into the dead tom's body. Fire had begun to circle around her, and she was aware she would not survive. She was to die. That was her destiny.

She laid down next to the dead tom and closed her eyes. Fire rushed towards her and then silence came--the silence and peacefulness of her life.

Epilogue

When Skycloud awoke, she found herself in the forest of peacefulness--StarClan. Suddenly, a pure white she-cat padded towards her, and Skycloud easily recognized her as Petalnose.

"Petalnose!" Skycloud gasped.

"You have been brave, my dear sister," Petalnose purred. "If only I were as brave as you."

"I'm not brave," Skycloud admitted. "You were always the bravest."

"You sent your kit off into the woods so that he may survive. You let death come to you even though you did not want it. You survived the deaths of all your mates and loved ones."

"I miss you, Petalnose," Skycloud said at last, tears gathering in her eyes.

The she-cat smiled warmly. "I did too. Thank you for taking care of my kits. I never wanted to leave them."

"I didn't want you to leave either. Your kits have grown up to be lovely," Skycloud purred.

"Are you ready to see your family again, Skycloud?" Petalnose asked.

"I've always been ready," she said.

A gray and white tom appeared next to Petalnose. Petalnose grinned, introducing the tom. "This is Olivetail, our father."

"You've grown so much, Skycloud," Olivetail purred. "I'm sorry I was never with you."

"But it has been a privilege to know you now," she told him, smiling. He rubbed against his daughter and sat down next to

Petalnose.

Suddenly, a familiar white and gray she-cat of the same color padded forward.

"MOTHER!" Skycloud exclaimed, rushing towards her mother.

Rosefur smiled, licking Skycloud's ear. "Oh, my dear, Skycloud. I love you so much. I'm sorry I left all my kits."

"You never left us," Petalnose spoke. "You were always with us."

Skycloud nodded, smiling as her mother sat down next to Olivetail.

A rambunctious kit, who looked similar to Rosefur and Olivetail, ran forward to greet Skycloud.

"Mousekit!" Skycloud exclaimed, smiling at the young she-cat.

Mousekit smiled prudly, greeting Skycloud. She then sat down next to her mother, grinning at Skycloud.

This time, a gray she-cat padded forward, and Skycloud gasped, "Oceanpaw!"

Oceanpaw grinned.

"I'm sorry I let you die," Skycloud cried.

"You did not let me die," Oceanpaw explained. "I was to die protecting my clan. Thank you for burying me. I did not want to be left as bird-bait like the other cats who died in battle."

Skycloud nudged the she-cat, watching as Oceanpaw smiled and then sat down next to her mother and sister.

The cat Skycloud dreaded to see the most appeared. Blacktail. A growl rumbled in Skycloud's throat as he padded forward.

"You've been brave raising our kits," he told her.

"I spent my life protecting you," she whispered angrily, "and you left me."

"I know, and I'm sorry."

Thorndapple padded forward, a grin on her face. "It's nice to see you, Skycloud."

The she-cat who had stolen her mate had seemed so happy. She obviously did not realize all the pain Skycloud had gone through.

"Hello, Thorndapple," she grumbled, trying to remember the kind apprentice that had played with her when she was a kit.

As Blacktail and Thorndapple sat down, a familiar white tom came forward.

"Tooth! You made it to StarClan!' Skycloud exclaimed, running to her mate and nuzzling him. "I'm so sorry I let you die."

"You didn't," Tooth purred. "I died with you, and that's what matters. You saved me from a terrible death."

Skycloud smiled, confused as to why she could see Icestar padding forward now.

Rosefur padded forward. "Skycloud, Icestar is my mother and your grandmother," she explained.

"I'm related to her?!" she exclaimed, bouncing up and down.

Rosefur grinned, laughing. "Yes. Icestar left me and my siblings when I was a mere apprentice to become leader. We traveled the forest to every clan because I wanted to find her, and we stayed in SnowClan because I knew Icestar was my mother."

Skycloud smiled, dipping her head towards the leader as she walked by.

A bright light shone, and a very familiar cat padded forward.

"Miss me?" he asked.

"MOSSCLAW!" Skycloud screeched, rushing towards him. She knocked down the tom, and the two laughed together.

"I'm so sorry you died! I missed you so much! Have you seen Mosskit? Isn't he great?" she asked.

Mossclaw laughed. "Wow, that's a lot of questions. I have seen Mosskit, and you raised him well. He is alive and safe."

Skycloud grinned, smiling as all the cats came together. Skycloud rested her head on Mossclaw's shoulder, smiling. He was back. Tooth stood next to her, smiling as well. She was with all the cats she loved, and for once, she was happy.

Author's Note

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading the first installment in the Mosskit series! I must say, I didn't expect so much success, but I thank you for checking out the series!

Be sure to check out Mosskit Book 2: The Journey and Mosskit Book 3: SnowClan for more adventures! Thank you again!

~Maeve